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JUDITH

A CHRONICLE OF OLD VIRGINIA

MARION HARLAND

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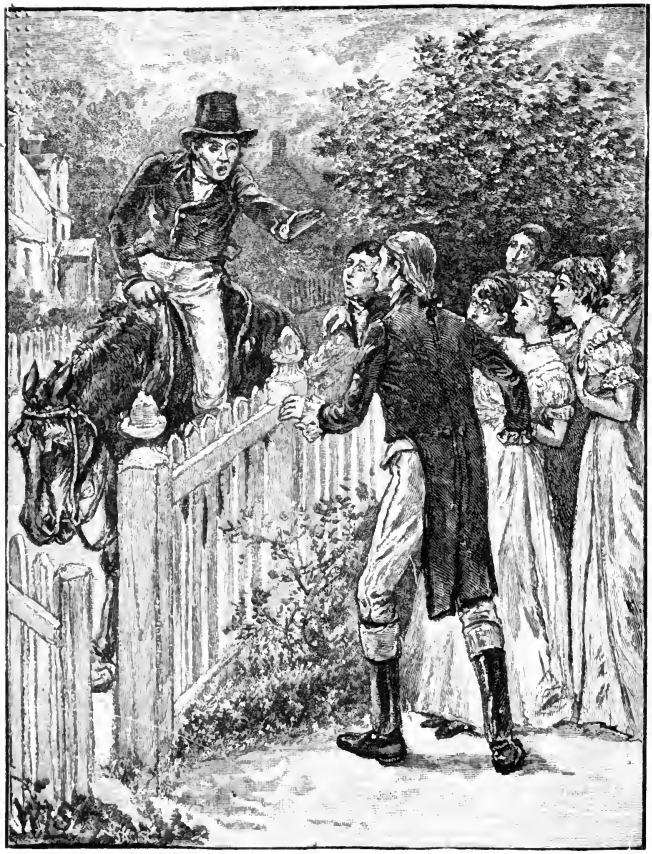

"THE NEGROES ARE RISING ALL OVER THE COUNTY."—p. 12.

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1883

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JUDITH:

A

CHRONICLE OF OLD VIRGINIA.

BY

MARION HARLAND,

Author of "Alone," "The Hidden Path," "Common Sense in the Household," "Eve's Daughters," etc.

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JUDITH:

A CHRONICLE OF OLD VIRGINIA.

CHAPTER I.

ALL the chimneys of the Summerfield homestead were built on the outside of the house. In a nook formed by the meeting of the outer wall with the parlor chimney, I sat on a certain August afternoon. The turf was soft under my feet; a lush trumpet-creeper ran all over the bricks and thrust tough fingers under the clapboards. I nestled among the leaves and orange-red flowers like an exaggerated June-bug. My frock was dark-blue calico, sprinkled with white dots; a sleeveless, high-necked apron left my arms bare; white home-knit stockings and stout shoes made by the plantation shoemaker covered my nether extremities.

The "New York Reader" lay on my lap—a valuable text-book bound between sides of coarse straw pasteboard. From the blue paper covering these, yellow splinters protruded at broken corners and abraded edges. I picked at one mechanically while reading of a boy who had, in defiance of his mother's warning never to taste strange flowers or grasses, made a light lunch upon a "pretty plant with a small white flower."

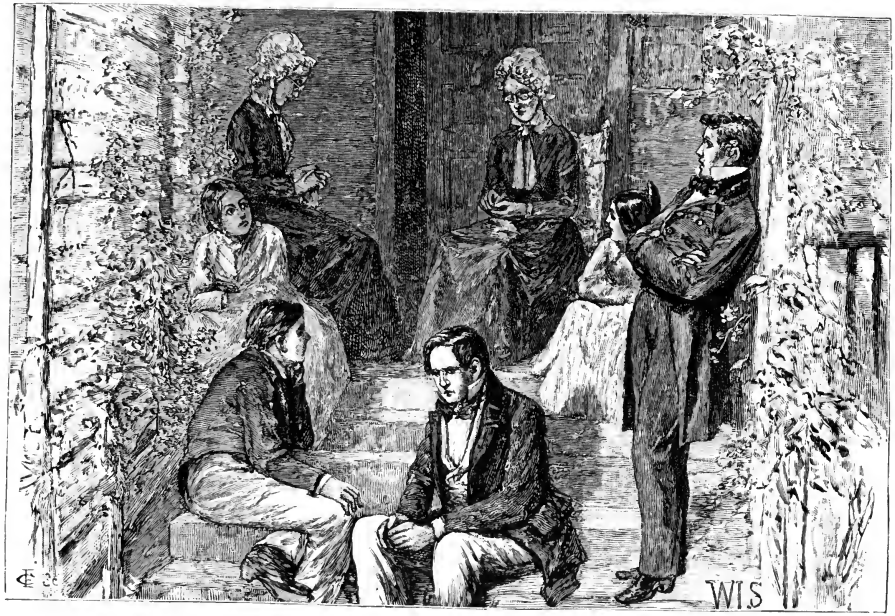
The catastrophe never lost its charm for me, and I recognized now for the fortieth time the coming of the creeping horror in reading how, "when his mother came to him, she was surprised to see that his mouth was

dirty." At this point, I became aware that my Aunt Betsey was telling a story.

The back porch ran the whole length of the main building and one wing, and was the family sitting-room all summer long. White jessamine and multiflora roses curtained it, drooping low and thick at the end nearest what I had named "my chimney-place."

My Aunt Betsey was the widow of a Presbyterian clergyman, who had died in less than a year after their marriage. The sad event had occurred thirty years prior to the date of my story, but she still wore mourning weeds in obedience to the custom of the day and the inclination of such simple, loving souls. Even young matrons sported caps then. That framing Aunt Betsey's face had a veritable crown, standing up stiff and high, and a border of quilled "footing." Her brown hair, interlined with silver, lay in smooth bands above her forehead. Her eyes were gray, mild and contemplative, and, when she conversed, looked at her auditor over her spectacles. She was knitting a lamb's-wool stocking, reeling off the sentences as evenly and naturally as she drew the yarn from the fleecy ball in her lap. She sat in a splint-bottomed, straight-backed chair, cushioned with gay chintz. Her sister and my grandmother, Mrs. Judith Read, the widowed mistress of Summerfield, sat in one exactly like it, and knitted a lamb's-wool sock for one of her sons. Neither touched the back of her chair while she worked.

I could never decide whether my grandmother reminded me more of a queen or of a saint. Her portrait, taken at sixty, is that of a stately gentlewoman, with black eyes, clear brunette complexion and high-bred, placid features. The deep black of her gown is relieved by a crimped lawn ruffle running around the neck and down to the belt in front. Her mob-cap is of sheer



"AUNT BETSEY WAS TELLING A STORY."—p. 8.

muslin, set above dark hair and tied under her chin with black "love" ribbons. At her throat is a red rose. She used to explain, in smiling apology for the decoration, that her youngest boy had pinned it there, and begged that it should appear in the picture. I had been too strictly trained in such matters to quote hymns on secular occasions; therefore, I never said aloud the line that forced itself into my mind at family worship and during the long sermons at Mounts Tabor and Hermon, when I fell into affectionate studies of my grandmother's face:

"Majestic sweetness sits enthroned."

Her near ancestors came of noble Huguenot stock. She had their bright eyes and radiant smile, chastened by sanctified sorrow into infinite gentleness. I never saw her angry, or heard a fretful syllable from her lips; yet she had buried the husband of her youth when the eldest of six children was but fourteen years old, and succeeded to the ownership of a fearfully-encumbered estate. Under her administration the debts had been paid and the plantation judiciously worked until her eldest son was qualified to take charge of it.

The porch steps were five oaken beams, eight inches thick, set in an easy slope from floor to ground, polished at the edges, and hollowed in the middle by the feet of five generations of Reads. An arch of trellis-work, thatched with vines, formed a pent-house over the porch entrance. On the top step sat two girls, my Aunt Maria and Miss Virginia Dabney, a city visitor. Below them were seated my Uncle Archie, Mr. Bradley, the Summerfield tutor, and my youngest uncle, Wythe Read, a lad of fifteen. Aunt Betsey was the family story-teller—the licensed and honored receptacle of genealogies and traditions. Her auditors were now, as always, respectful and interested.

In this, our day, when every scrap of local and general intelligence is seized upon by professional scribes, held up to the light, shaken thoroughly and scraped into lint for application to the ever-fevered sore of public curiosity, the rôle of the oral *raconteur* is so unimportant that it is going out of fashion.

"Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation," is a process the simplicity of which moves us to smiles. Yet what a barren flat would be our record of happenings not yet fifty years old but for the elderly women who loved to relate unwritten reminiscences, and the young people who liked to listen on the door-steps and about the hearthstones of our homesteads when newspapers were few and popular histories unknown?

"I was in Richmond at the time of Gabriel's insurrection," the dear woman was saying when I lifted my head and hitched my cricket nearer to listen,—"on a visit to Cousin Sarah Blair. There was a party at her house that night, and after supper we went out into the garden. I was sitting on a bench in a honeysuckle arbor (Cousin Sarah's flowers and fruit were famous) with Jo Pleasants. He married Lizzy Blair the year afterward. She (Lizzy) was singing 'Robin Adair' in the parlor. The windows were all open, and we could hear every word. I never hear that song to this day without a queer, creepy feeling up my back and a faintness about my heart; and the smell of honeysuckles on a warm night makes me positively sick. It was very hot and close, and while we talked Jo pointed out a cloud rising in the west. It was black—a sort of blue-black—and topped with white as it swelled up toward the moon. Jo said it reminded him of a gray-headed negro, and I laughed, although I was always timid in a thunder-storm. The shape *was* like that of an enor-

mous man pulling himself up to his full height very slowly. When the big, broad shoulders and one arm came in sight Jo called to the others to look at it. They came, one after another, until nearly all the company was gathered about the gate, and two or three went out into the middle of the street to get a better view. The breeze had died down completely, and the sound of the falls in the river was very distinct, as it always is just before a storm. Jo said we might imagine that it was the roar of the giant advancing upon us.

"'Oh, don't!' said I. 'I am afraid that is a tempting of Providence.'

"'I can see his teeth and the whites of his eyes,' called back one of the young men who had gone into the street.

"It did really seem as if we could. The mighty shape rose higher and higher, and broader, and the arm was raised over the head, one forefinger, yards long, pointing right at Richmond. Then this finger changed into something like a pitchfork or trident.

"'It 's the Old Harry himself!' said the same young man, but his laugh wasn't very natural.

"Lizzy had left the piano and ran down the steps toward us, still singing:

> "'What, when the ball was o'er,
> What made my heart so sore?'

"When she saw the cloud she seized my arm with a little cry:

"'What is it? Oh, what *does* it mean?'

"She shook like an aspen leaf, and Jo and I were trying to quiet her when we heard far off the beat of a horse's hoofs dashing along at full speed.

"'There he comes, Miss Lizzy!' said somebody, thinking to amuse her and turn her attention.

"She gave one shriek and went off into hysterics.

She was a delicate, nervous little thing, with no constitution at all. She died young, and no wonder! One ran for water and another for hartshorn, and half a dozen rushed up with fans. In the confusion we forgot the horse. I jumped as if I had been shot, when a hoarse voice said in my ear:

"'*You've heard it already, then?*'

"A man had ridden up to the garden fence and leaned over toward us. He talked strangely, panting between each syllable loud enough for us all to hear him.

"'Why, Colonel Prosser!' cried Jo Pleasants, 'what is the matter?'

"Lizzy stopped sobbing, and we stared at him, frightened already by his face and manner. He was deadly pale, and his eyes glared wildly.

"'Get the ladies in-doors directly!' he panted in the same odd way. 'Some of you fellows run to the armory. I've sent my body-servant there ahead of me. Some hurry down to the Capitol and have the barracks bell rung. The negroes are rising all over the county. I left hundreds of them on my plantation. They shot at me as I leaped the garden fence. I met squads of them —all armed—on the road. They are marching on the city. There is not a minute to be lost.'

"Scared as I was, I thought of Job's servants, with their—'I alone am escaped to tell thee.'

"While he was speaking the cloud swallowed up the moon at one gulp, as it seemed, and it grew so dark in an instant that we had to grope our way to the house. Cousin Sarah's two grown sons, Walter and Hugh, offered to stay at home to guard us, but she wouldn't hear of it. Tom was fourteen, John twelve, and she said they were able to fire through a window should the house be attacked. There were four guns on the

premises, besides the sword and pistols Colonel Blair, her husband, had used in the Revolutionary war. She could pull a trigger as well as a man. Hugh and Walter must be off to the Blues' muster-room and help defend the town. Hugh was a lieutenant in the Richmond Blues, and Walter a private. When the men were gone she called us girls into the parlor and shut the door.

"'Look here, Elizabeth Scott Blair!' says she—cool and sharp, like a mustard-plaster—'Go to that piano and begin to sing—*directly!*'

"I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw that girl cross the room, sit down on the music-stool and run her fingers over the keys. I suppose that, her wits being clean gone for the time, her mother's will just took hold of her—*possessed* her—and she could do nothing but mind her. Anyhow she began to sing the very song at which she had left off playing not ten minutes before:

"'What 's this dull town to me?
Robin 's not here!
What 's here I wish to see?
Robin Adair!'

"Cousin Sarah was gone from the room for maybe three minutes, and returned with the boys and the guns, as Lizzy finished the last verse.

"'Now—the Battle of Prague!' she ordered—'and as loud as you can make it!'

"She gathered the rest of us—ten in all—into a corner and set us to work cleaning and loading the guns, and filling powder-flasks and shot-pouches. I think what made me most calm was her sending me up-stairs for check aprons to keep our frocks clean. The sight and feel of the everyday working-clothes steadied me, and helped me to think. I saw, in coming down the stairs, Uncle Solomon, the butler, and three colored

women in the dining-room washing up and putting away the supper things, laughing and talking and too busy to notice me. Somehow, that brought the danger and horror to me as I had not seen them before. *These* were our enemies—the foes in our own household—the people who had carried us, when we were babes, in their arms and our fathers' and mothers' coffins to the grave! the people almost as dear to us as our very nearest kinsfolk!

"Cousin Sarah treated me to a hard look when she took the aprons from me.

"'This is no time for fooling, nor for thinking,' she said, and gave me a bunch of greasy cotton with a pistol and a thick wire. 'Clean out the barrel with that, and then I'll load it. As long as that piano is going, the servants can't hear the alarm-bell. If they get a notion that there's a fire down town the fools will be off to see it, and leave their work until they come back. I want to get them out the house as soon as possible. Besides, they mustn't suspect that we have heard anything unusual. If there is a conspiracy between the country and the town negroes, those here will wait for the others to come, unless they find out that the plot is known. An hour's time is worth a great deal to us just now.'

"The Battle of Prague must have drowned the first thunder rolls, for we heard nothing of the storm until a tremendous clap burst right overhead, and the room was filled with blue fire. The girls screamed, and poor Lizzy dropped to the floor in a dead faint. We thought at first that she was struck. If she had been I doubt if her mother would have acted differently from what she did. She helped lay Lizzy on one sofa, huddled all the firearms, the sword and ammunition under another, and poked the check aprons after them, before she called

Marthy, Lizzy's maid, to bring water and the camphor-bottle. Marthy had not known till then that the gentlemen had gone. Maybe I did her injustice, being excited, but I thought there was something queer in her smile when she looked around as Lizzy came to.

"'Law, young ladies!' she said pertly, 'is Miss 'Lizabeth done scare all the beaux away by faintin'?'

"Another crash of thunder saved us the trouble of a reply.

"'The young ladies will stay here until the shower is over,' said Cousin Sarah. 'The gentlemen had no umbrellas. Hurry, all of you, to shut up the house, or you won't be able to get to the kitchen for the rain.'

"In ten minutes we had the house to ourselves. As Marthy ran across the yard to her room we heard her scream at the blaze that wrapped heavens and earth in a sheet of flame. Cousin Sarah made Patsey Dabney—your father's oldest sister, Virginia—and me help her fasten doors and windows. We shut and bolted the solid blinds on the first floor, put bars across front and back doors, then followed our commanding officer up to Lizzy's room. It was a big, square one, with windows on three sides. The shutters of those at the back were closed. We brought in beds, bolsters and pillows to put up against the others that faced the streets in front and at the end of the house. We were to block these up at the word of command, leaving loop-holes for firing. Tom was put in charge of one gun, John of another; Deborah Chapman volunteered for a third, Janey Mosby for a fourth. Cousin Sarah had on a great, big pocket and her pistols in it. Elvira Burton took the sword, and we divided up a box of table-knives among us.

"All this time the thunder was splitting and rolling and rattling above the house, and the white and blue streams of lightning almost blinding us. When everything was

done that we could think of, Cousin Sarah made us sit down on the feather-beds in the middle of the floor. *That* was the hardest thing of all!—the sitting there, waiting and listening and dreading, hearing nothing from hour to hour but the thunder-claps, and, when these were not so loud (they never ceased!), the rain pouring down in floods—waiting to be killed by bullet or knife, or maybe burned alive in the locked-up house, for we knew that Cousin Sarah would never turn a key or bolt to let us out if the roof were fired above our heads. She meant resistance unto death from the moment she set Lizzy down to the piano. We put out the lights, not to call attention to the building; but we were not in the dark for a second. About twelve o'clock we began to whisper among ourselves that *they* must be here very soon now. The storm was passing, the thunder fainter, and the lightning less bright. We caught by snatches, between the heavy dashes of rain on the roof and windows, the fast, irregular ringing of the alarm-bells—told one another this must mean that the town was attacked at some point.

"Cousin Sarah got up and went out of the room. Presently she called to us from the garret:

"'Come up here, girls!—very quietly!'

"She was in the cupola. From there we had a view of the armory. The windows were all flashing with light, and torches were moving in the yard and streets surrounding it. There were other specks of light far down town, and here and there lighted windows nearer to us. But overhead and close about us was the very blackness of darkness that might be felt—an awful sort of *smothering* gloom, as if we were in the heart of the cloud. For the first time in two hours, I remembered the strange shape we had seen in the heavens, and said to myself that it was certainly a sign and a warning of

what was to befall us. While we stood there the blackness opened suddenly, and a cataract of lightning—I can't call it anything else—fell right down upon us. I saw the face of every person in the cupola as plainly as I do yours now. The thunder burst out with it, crashing and booming again and again, as if it would never stop.

"Cousin Sarah had to raise her voice to be heard:

"'We must go down—another cloud is rising!'

"She spoke again, as we huddled together, shivering and shaking, on the pile of feather-beds:

"'We are in God's hands. Let us fall into them rather than into the hands of bloody and deceitful men!'

"By-and-by we heard her say:

"'The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed.'

"But for her we would have gone stark mad that night. Anything like the horribleness of that second storm I hope never to see again. It was like the terrors of the Judgment day. The heavens were rolled together like a scroll; the earth seemed to be on fire. The thunder was never quite still for five hours. By the time it ceased to mutter in the east it roared out again in the west, and the lightnings chased and overtook one another in mid-heaven. The rain was a deluge.

"'This will make a "fresh" in the river,' Cousin Sarah said once.

"'What difference will that make to *us?*' answered one of the girls—Abigail Burton by name.

"Even then Cousin Sarah didn't let the speech pass.

"'Don't let me hear any more such talk as that!' she said, as quick as a flash. 'Is the Lord's arm shortened that it cannot save?'

"Poor little John had dropped asleep, his head on his

mother's lap. By a gleam of lightning I saw her, after a while, stoop over him and kiss him two or three times on his mouth. Then she eased his head down on the pillows and walked to a window. We knew in a second that she had heard something. One by one we stole after her to the front windows and looked out, those who were nearest the wall kneeling down, that the others might see over their heads. We all heard it, though nobody spoke or moved—when the thunder-peals were furthest off—the 'splash! splash!' of men's and horses' feet and the crowding together of many people. 'Hundreds of them!' I fancied I could hear Colonel Prosser repeat the words. And we a handful of weak women and two little boys! The alarm-bells had stopped ringing long ago. Perhaps the white people had given up all idea of saving the city. How was it possible to do it when in every house there were traitors, and a countless horde of murderers marching upon us in the dead of night?

"Cousin Sarah's voice went through and through me, although she spoke low:

"'They are going *out* of town—not coming in!'

"We all seemed to think together that night. In comparing notes afterward every girl said her first thought was at that instant that the town negroes had seized the armory, killed the guard, armed themselves and were now on their way to meet Gabriel's army. A downpour of lightning lit up everything outside—the flooded street, the still houses and trees and fences, and right in front of us, a mounted company of *white* men! Military cloaks and blankets protected their arms from the rain, but as they broke into a slow trot we heard the clink of spurs and sabres.

"'The Blues!' said Cousin Sarah in a shrill, strangled whisper. 'I see my boys!'

"We leaned far out of the windows to shake our handkerchiefs to them. Another flash showed us twenty faces turned up toward us, but not a sound was uttered by them or by us.

"'Have they left *anybody* to guard the town?' whispered Lizzy, as the last of the long line disappeared.

"'*The Lord of Hosts!*' said Cousin Sarah, in a clear, solemn voice.

"She stood up in the middle of the room, raised both hands like she was in church.

"'Let us pray!' said she; and we all fell on our knees around her. What a prayer she made for the brave men who had gone out to meet the enemy, and for ourselves, our families, our homes, our churches, our beloved Richmond! At last she prayed for the poor, deluded creatures who had followed the lead of wicked men, and been taught to thirst for the blood of their best friends.

"At that she gave way for the first time, and we all burst out crying. For some minutes nothing was heard but weeping and sobbing. Then Cousin Sarah got back voice enough to say:

"'Father, forgive them! they know not what they do!'

"We said, 'Amen! Amen!' We could not be fierce and angry any longer, and our hearts were stayed by hope as well as by prayer; but none of us, except the boys, slept a wink that night. Seven distinct thunder-clouds arose one after another between ten o'clock and four, and were emptied upon the earth; but the awful figure we had seen flying toward us was the angel of deliverance, not of destruction.

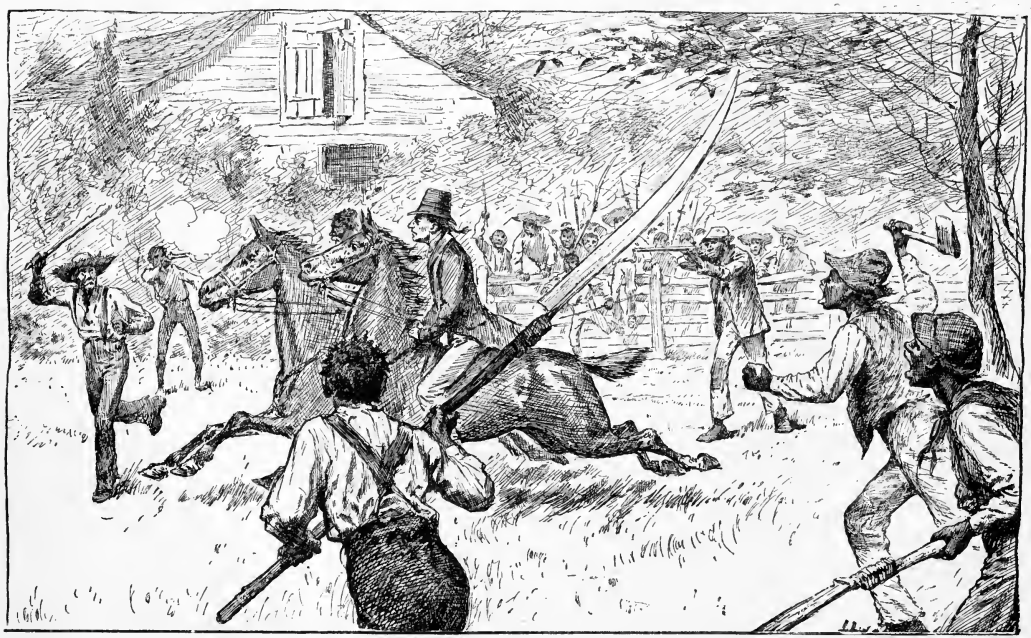
"The rising was on Colonel Prosser's plantation, Brook Hill, about six miles from Richmond. His family was away from home, and he was known to be an easy

master, who wouldn't be apt to notice unusual movements about the place. The plan was to kill him when they were all assembled, ransack his house for weapons and ammunition (he was a colonel of militia in Henrico County), and to take his horses. His body-servant slipped out of the tobacco-barn where they were talking it over, ran to the stable and saddled two of the best hunters. Then he went to his master's room, told him what was going on, and to ride for his life. The two were hardly mounted when some of the gang caught sight of them and gave the alarm. Master and man dashed straight across the yard and put their horses at the garden fence. Five or six shots were fired at them before they cleared the two fences between them and the public road. Colonel Prosser could never allude to his escape without shuddering. He said the negroes rushed at him from all directions, and that their yells were like a pack of wolves.

"Michael!" in the same soft, even tones that had borne the story thus far, "bring that water this way, won't you?"

A bare-footed negro boy, dressed in yellow homespun, had brought a cedar-wood pail, bound with bright brass hoops, up the steps at the far end of the porch, and was in the act of setting it on a triangular shelf supported by the railings. He swung it back to his head from which he had just let it down, and obeyed the order he had received. Uncle Archie arose from the steps as the lad dexterously lowered his burden, dipped the white gourd bobbing about on the surface, into the water, and handed it to his aunt, his hand held beneath to catch the drops shed by the glistening sides.

"Aunt Betsey always grows thirsty at the most interesting part of her story," laughed Aunt Maria. "I



"MASTER AND MAN DASHED STRAIGHT ACROSS THE YARD."—p. 20.

don't mind it so much this time, because I know the rest. But it is cruel to those of you who don't."

"Like '*To be continued*' in a magazine serial," replied Mr. Bradley.

His speech was very unlike that of the others, more precise in articulation and unrhythmical in inflection. He pronounced *i* like *eye* in such words as "like" and "right," and sometimes *u* like *oo*.

"Mrs. Waddell plays with us as a cat with a mouse, or an angler with a fish," he continued. "It is a professional trick, meant to whet our appetites for the rest. A successful one in this case."

"Michael!"—Grandma checked him by saying as he passed her—"don't put a drinking-water pail on your head. It is not considered proper. You will learn all these little things after awhile. He has only been up from the Quarter for a few days," she mentioned, apologetic of the mistake to Virginia Dabney, when the boy was out of hearing. "He comes of excellent parents, and will do well as a house-servant under Jerry's training. He is Rose's child—one of the twins, you know."

"Isn't the name of the other Gabriel?" asked the young lady, with pretty abruptness.

Uncle Archie smiled down at her from his stand against a porch pillar.

"You remember that, do you? Yes; the mother called them, of her own accord, after the archangels—Gabriel and Michael. You don't admire her taste, it would seem."

"I have nothing against Michael. I don't remember his brother. But I shall hate him at sight, on account of his name. If I were Mrs. Read he should change it, or leave the plantation."

CHAPTER II.

"THE insurgents were howling like wolves, Mrs. Waddell," resumed the tutor in playful persistence. "It is unkind to leave us with the echo in our ears while you set the heel of that stocking."

Aunt Betsey was counting stitches, but desisted at the word "unkind," as the artful speaker had foreseen.

"Gabriel was an unusually intelligent negro. His master had petted him from his childhood and his mistress taught him to read. He showed what a dangerous thing a little learning is by plotting a general massacre of the white people, sparing only some young women, who were to be the maids of the leaders' colored wives, and half a dozen who were to marry the principal men. They meant to fire the city in three places at once; then a trumpet, 'blown long and loud,' would let the conspirators know that the hour had come, and be the signal of attack upon the armory. The small company of soldiers there would be killed, the arms secured, and the building held as a fort by a certain number, while the rest went from house to house, slaughtering young and old. A chosen band was to make sure of the ladies already selected, and guard them to the armory. 'Everything else that wears a white skin must die,' was one of Gabriel's general orders. A paper containing the list was found in his pocket, and a rough sketch of the government he hoped to establish. He was known among his followers as 'General Gabriel.' When the white folks were all dead, he was to be crowned 'King of Virginia.' Richmond was chosen as his capital, and

Mrs. Marcia Randolph, a beautiful widow, for his queen."

"You may have seen her cookery-book, 'The Virginia Housewife,' Mr. Bradley," interpolated Grandma. "Your mother uses it I know, Virginia, my dear. It is a valuable work, although rather expensive for people of moderate means."

"The next in office were to be presidents. Then came princes and governors and counsellors," went on the narrator.

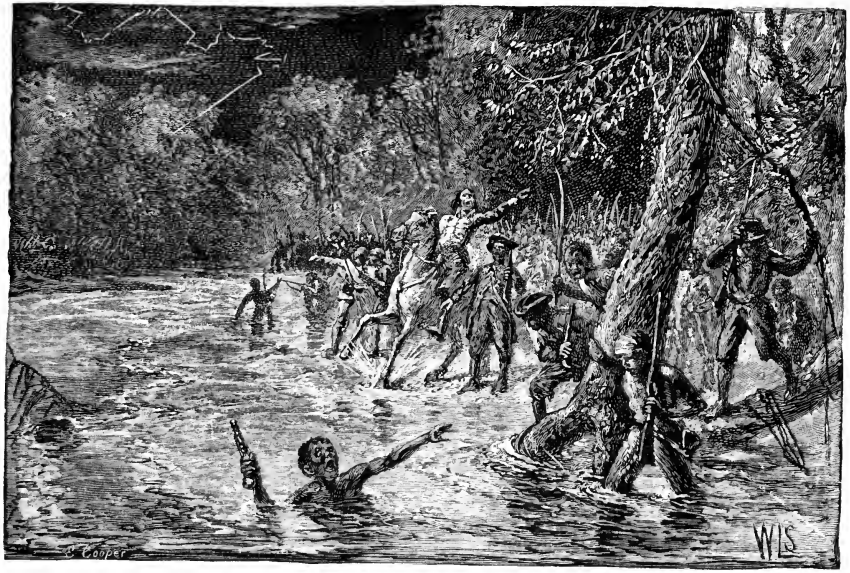
"Borrowed wholesale from the Book of Daniel," commented Mr. Bradley. "I wonder at his copying a heathen form of government."

"That was where he got it all. Each of these officers, as I have said, was to have a white wife to add dignity to his position. The plot had been working for a year. It will never be known in this world how many knew of it or would have joined in the bloody work. There were a thousand at Gabriel's back when he halted his horse on the bank of a branch of the Chickahominy River, that lay between them and the city. It was a shallow creek they could have crossed on foot at sundown that day; but the heavy rain had swelled it into a deep, rushing stream they dared not try to ford. Gabriel called a council of war there in the storm. They knew, of course, that Colonel Prosser and his man had escaped, but they were not sure that they had gone to Richmond. While they argued and disputed among themselves, a negro boy, about twenty years old, named Pharaoh, belonging to Mr. William Mosby, stole down the creek in the darkness, plunged in, and swam to the other side. That shows what might have been done by many had not the Lord, in mercy to us, withheld them from the attempt. Pharaoh started to Richmond, and met the white troops about a mile outside of the city.

From him they had full information as to the state of affairs, and marched directly to the creek. The negroes were still on the other side when the troops got to the bank nearest town. Five or six of the bravest, urged by Gabriel and Jack Bowler, his right-hand man, had tried to swim over, and been drowned. The stream was boiling like a pot and rising every minute, and they were sucked right under in the sight of the rest. After that nobody would risk the crossing.

"Gabriel was preaching to them when the troops arrived. The constant glare of lightning lit up both parties. The white men had heard Gabriel before they saw him standing on the edge of the water, and close by him Jack Bowler, who was a perfect giant, almost six and a half feet high, and as strong as four or five ordinary men. He had persuaded the negroes that the Lord had made him on purpose to deliver them, as He did Samson to deliver the Israelites. His hair was long and thick, and had never been cut. He wore it generally in a cue, like a gentleman's, but this night he let it hang loose on his shoulders, to remind his men of Samson's hair, 'wherein his great strength lay.' Both of these men were under thirty, and could read and write. They were armed to the teeth, and Gabriel had put on Colonel Prosser's regimental suit. Around and behind them was a crowd that looked like tens of thousands, heaving and murmuring. Walter Blair said the sound reminded him of the pushing and grunting of a herd of hogs. It bristled with all sorts of weapons. Some had guns, some axes, some hatchets, and many side-blades (scythes) fastened to the ends of poles. The lightning flashed on hundreds of these, ground sharp and rubbed bright.

"The white men fired directly into the body of the crowd, for the creek was not, even in the freshet, twenty



"AFTER THAT NOBODY WOULD RISK THE CROSSING."—p. 24.

yards wide. A few shots were fired back, but most of the poor, foolish things had never thought of keeping guns and powder dry. The leaders hallooed to them to 'stand still and see the salvation of the Lord,' but it was of no use. They scattered in all directions, like scared sheep."

"They are a race of born cowards," observed Uncle Archie, in careless contempt. "One white man armed with a cornstalk could put a battalion of them to flight. Their attempts at insurrection can never be anything but ridiculous failures. It is like a boy bullying and bragging with a pea pop-gun."

"Pop-gun peas have put out grown folks' eyes before now," returned Grandma seriously. "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side that night, blood would have flowed like a river. In many homes in Richmond there was no hope of escape from violent death. My dear friend, Mrs. Jean Wood, wife of Governor Wood, was then living at their place, Chelsea, a little way out of town. There was no member of the white family at home but herself when a neighbor stopped at her door in the storm to tell her what was going on, and to invite her to go to his house. She would not stir from home.

"'We are all marked for certain death before the rising of another sun,' she said calmly. 'I should only add to your responsibility and distress the pain of seeing me die.'

"Neither would she lock her doors.

"'Resistance will make them the more cruel,' she said. 'All that I shall ask of my murderers will be to put me to no useless suffering, but to despatch me quickly and decently.'

"Then she thanked him for his kindness in giving her

timely notice of her departure, and hoped she should see him in heaven very soon.

"'It will not make much difference to us then whether we have got there by a rough or a smooth road,' was the last thing she said, as he went down the front steps. 'Good night. We won't have to say *that* up there!'

"Everybody agreed afterward that her expectations were most reasonable. The police force was weak and inefficient, and the negroes who were marching upon the town outnumbered the white troops at least five to one, without taking into account those in the city—what Betsey calls the 'foes in the household.' Mrs. Wood acted wisely in preparing to die before morning. She told me afterward how wonderfully she was supported. She set her room in perfect order, bathed from head to foot, and shrouded herself in a new night-gown that had never been worn. Then she read the fourteenth chapter of St. John and the twenty-first and twenty-second of Revelations, said her prayers, committing her soul to her Saviour, and asking God to forgive and have mercy upon them who sought her life, and lay down upon the outside of her bed, her husband's miniature in her hand, to wait the coming of the rebels."

"That sounds like a chapter from the 'Book of Martyrs,'" cried young Bradley animatedly. "I never heard anything finer. Your friend was a heroine, Mrs. Read."

"She was a *Christian*," answered Grandma simply. "That was the way Dr. Rice summed up her attractions and merits in the beautiful obituary he wrote of her. After speaking of her brilliant conversation and personal charms—which, he says, made young people 'prefer her society to their gay novels'—her natural affection, her patriotism, her conduct as a friend, a neighbor and a philanthropist, he concludes with: 'To crown

"WE THREW OPEN ONE WINDOW AFTER ANOTHER AND LISTENED."—p. 27.

the whole, Mrs. Wood was a Christian. Not by traditionary faith, not with a cold assent of the understanding, but with the whole heart.'

"She told me, too, that she never in after-life knew a single fear of death. God gave her gracious assurance in the lonely watches of that night that as her day so should her strength be. When the morning dawned, and with it the news of the dispersion of the insurgents, it cost her an effort to come back to earth and thoughts of an earthly future, so sweet had been her meditations, so sure was her hope of her heavenly home. As she expressed it: 'It was being turned back when I had my hand on the door-knob.' Her first act after dressing herself for the day and putting away her shroud was to call in the servants just as usual for family prayers. Her maid used to tell how her mistress noticed when breakfast was ready that the table-cloth was slightly crooked, and had the china taken off that it might be straightened before she sat down. She made no reference whatever to what had passed; behaved to her servants exactly as she had always done, making them understand that she bore them no grudge for the faults of others of their color.

"The women of that day certainly had brave hearts," said Aunt Betsey, serenely forgetful of the fact that she was one of the commended class. "We girls were just worn out by daybreak. We were cramped with sitting in a bunch on the floor, faint with the weary waiting and constant dreading. Lizzy had to go regularly to bed when the strain was over, and stay there for a week. We had good news by the time we could see across the street. The rain and thunder had passed by, but the clouds hung low, almost touching the tops of the chimneys. The air was close and 'muggy.' We threw open one window after another and listened. It

was the stillest morning I ever knew. The flowers were beaten flat to the ground, the bushes were dripping wet. I can seem to smell now the bruised honeysuckles and lilies that strewed the grass. Presently we heard the long, steady gallop of a horse through the mud. Then a dark figure reined up at the gate, and Jo Pleasants' voice called:

"'All 's well, Mrs. Blair!'

"We rushed down stairs in a body, tore back bolts and bars, and ran out to him. He was coated with mud up to the eyes. You couldn't have told the color of his horse. He twisted himself sideways in his saddle, his hand on the horse's back, in the way men have when they want to seem particularly at their ease, and says he:

"'I am sorry we had to leave you so unceremoniously last night, ladies, but the country gentlemen we went to call upon could not be put off. Hugh and Walter charged me with a dozen messages about breakfast, Mrs. Blair, but I have forgotten all except fried chicken, batter-cakes and coffee. They are wet and hungry, and will be here in the course of two or three hours—as soon as *the hunt* is over.'

"I saw Cousin Sarah's hand shut down hard upon the gate.

"'Was anybody killed?' she asked outright.

"'I am afraid not!' said Jo, and a strange, fierce expression went over his face, very different from his usual kind, merry look.

"I saw the same very often in men's eyes and countenances in the next few weeks. The white people were enraged and disappointed at the conduct of the servants they had regarded as part of their families. They had never dreamed of such a thing as a general rising of the negroes. Yet here it was actually upon

us! If Colonel Prosser's body-servant had been as false as the rest; if Mr. Mosby's Pharaoh had been less soft-hearted, even the rising of the water would only have delayed the destruction of the city. Gabriel would have gone around the head of the creek, or down lower to a bridge. Men had been so close to a horrible death —had seen so clearly the fate that threatened their wives and innocent babes—that they could not forgive and forget directly. It was many months before we were quite easy in our minds, before we got back our confidence in the people that cooked our victuals and nursed our children.

"Gabriel and, I think, three others of the ringleaders were taken in different hiding-places and brought to Richmond jail. They had a fair trial, and were condemned to death. They were hanged in October of the same year—1800."

"But the thousands of followers?" questioned Mr. Bradley. "Surely they were not suffered to go unpunished?"

"Why not, poor things?" Aunt Betsey's merciful eyes put the query more emphatically than did her tongue. "If they had not been deceived and tempted and led on by designing men they would never have thought of lifting a finger against us. The day after the rising, they were all back in their homes, doing housework, hoeing corn, picking off tobacco-worms—whatever was the business set for them, just as if nothing had happened. Their owners asked no questions. They didn't want to know which of them had meant to butcher them in their beds not twelve hours before."

"It was a false step, nevertheless—mistaken mercy!" insisted the tutor, rising as he talked. "The claims of justice should have been satisfied at whatever cost of expediency or personal feeling. So deep a wound to

the body politic could not be safely salved over or covered up. The thorough course is always the best one. The matter should have been probed to the bottom. Who knows but that the bullet is there still?"

"Suppose nothing short of amputation—say of both legs—would save the patient's life?" said Uncle Archie. "In plainer words—there is, in my opinion, but one way of avoiding the risk of servile insurrection. That is, to get rid of slavery."

"You should be a better judge of that than myself," rejoined the Northerner. "In New England it became unprofitable and inconvenient, and it is *not*. There is the history, in one sentence, of emancipation with us."

"It is not so profitable here that we need sell our lives to preserve it," replied the other. "Public feeling on this subject has changed materially since the last century. Good men do not hesitate to express their views to the effect that the abolition of the system is inevitable; and, taking everything into consideration, desirable. But, for the sake of the servant, no less than that of the master, we must dispense with it by degrees, as they are doing in the Middle States."

"Their being here in a state of bondage is a wrong inflicted upon them and us by our forefathers; a wrong for which we, their descendants, must pay dearly unless we set it right."

My grandmother offered the observation as a self-evident proposition, and the listeners heard it as quietly as if she had remarked on the August drouth.

Uncle Archie laughed, but with no show of other emotion than affectionate amusement.

"Mother takes steady aim when slaveholding comes within gunshot. And all the while she knows that her servants could not be so well cared for anywhere else as they are on her plantation. The sin of having them

here does not weigh upon my mind so much as a doubt as to the best way of shaking the state clear of them. For the one we have to blame Dutch and New England pirates and nigger-traders. The other is an existing evil with which we must deal personally."

"By evil do you mean sin, and sin *per se?*" demurred Mr. Bradley.

"Unless the Declaration of Independence is a lie," the Virginian responded. "Since we have adopted it as the rule of political faith and practice we should live up to it. The ownership of an enslaved nation is a satire upon a republic, however well it may have agreed with monarchy and colonial times."

"Pshaw! now they 're beginning to talk politics!" thought I, vexed at the diversion from the delightful horrors of Aunt Betsey's story. I did not like political talk, yet much of the essence of it was absorbed by the pores of my small mental being. I was used to discussions in the key of that which I have just recorded. The inconveniences and injustice of slavery—which nobody spelled with a capital S, or thought it safest to mention under his breath—were freely admitted by serious thinkers. The divine origin of what had not then been dubbed "The Peculiar Institution" was not an article of the Virginian's creed. Many influential planters had openly expressed their intention of manumitting their servants by will, and were shaping their financial plans to that effect. I had heard my own parents commend such a course; was familiar with the idea that by the time I was grown, "the colored folks" would all be free with comfortable homes of their own. From babyhood I was taught to be respectful to the elder servants and not to maltreat the younger. "Because," as was often impressed upon me, "it is mean to strike one who has no right to strike back."

The affectionate intercourse between the white family and their negroes was a matter of course—a perfectly natural state of affairs in the estimation of all parties concerned. "The children" included those of all complexions. "Mam Peggy," the cook for forty years in the Summerfield kitchen, swept me out of her domain when she was cross or busy, as emphatically as she did her grandchildren. My grandmother and aunts sat up at night with the sick at "the Quarter," tending them as assiduously as they cared for invalids of their own blood and name. The oldest colored person on the plantation had been born there and his parents before him. "Our family" was referred to and quoted oftener by them than by their owners, and meant the Summerfield Reads.

I state these facts in explanation of the consternation that clutched my heart in the review of the tale I have set down as it fell from my aunt's lips. I had never imagined until this hour the existence of the sleeping demon in home and state. The shock could hardly have been greater had doubts of my sweet mother's loving kindness been injected into my mind, or if, under the clear frills of Grandma's cap, the wolf's eyes had glared into mine as she gave me a "good-night" kiss. I positively ached all over when I ceased listening, and began to reflect upon the revelation unfolded by her who, I instinctively divined, would never have touched upon it had she dreamed of my proximity. With the inconsistent reticence of childhood I remained quiet, shrinking yet farther into my "chimney-place," not daring to stir hand or foot for fear the rustling vines should betray me and my innocent eavesdropping. Why had this dreadful possibility of treachery and carnage been veiled from me all the ten years of my life? My uncle had not hidden from my childish

comprehension the meaning of the portentous words, "*servile insurrection.*" Both were new to me, but I gathered the force of the phrase and shuddered away from the pit opened at my feet. It was like the awakening from peaceful dreams to find the chamber walls ablaze and tottering inward.

From my nook I looked across the yard, shaded by locust and aspen, to a row of hale Lombardy poplars, stretching illimitable shadows over turf, house and garden. Beyond the poplars and the white yard-fence swelled smooth rolls of land, green with corn, cotton and tobacco. Afar off was the plantation gate opening upon the highway, the road to it twisting like a dull-red ribbon between the fields. Two tobacco-barns, built of hewn logs, stood close beside it, a hundred yards apart—unsightly edifices, set flush with the road for the convenience of loading the wagons that were to transport the valuable product to market. To my left, the sward was spread past well and ice-house to the picket-fence railing in the house-yard. Within this inclosure were the kitchen and what the English call "offices"—laundry, store-rooms and the "smoke-house," in which the bacon was cured in the winter and stored for the year's use. A neat story-and-a-half cabin between dwelling and garden was "Mammy's house," the lodging from generation to generation of the confidential maid of the mistress of Summerfield and the nurse of her children. A flagged walk led directly from this to "the chamber" on the first floor of "the house." Other paths, unpaved, streaked the grass in the direction of well, offices and "the Quarter." This was a cluster of cabins on a slight eminence over against the hill on which the house stood and nearly an eighth of a mile distant. Beyond, and girdling all, was the forest line.

Gabriel, Michael's double, smock-frocked, bare-

headed and bare-footed, was driving the cows home from pasture along the winding red road. As he lounged at the heels of the herd he whistled a plantation melody. A mocking-bird in the tallest Lombardy poplar added a pipe that was hardly sweeter and clearer.

A tame and unromantic scene—but endeared to me by associations more venerable than personal memories. I had drawn my first breath under the roof of the old house against which I now leaned, my mother having, as was the manner of the day, come back to *her* mother's care for her time of trial. Bellair, the patrimonial estate, to which my father had succeeded, was in another county across the river, and on higher ground than Summerfield; but throughout a delicate childhood no other air agreed so well with me as that which wandered among the low hills environing my birthplace. I asked no better entertainment than the society of the aunts who borrowed me for months at a time; no richer queendom than my sovereignty over the crew of colored children who were my comrades in tramps through field and wood, my loving satellites in the simple round of daily duties and pleasures.

Family annals and plantation traditions had been my delight from the time I could run and talk. There was an assimilative quality in such to my mental and moral constitution that made them a corporate part of thought and existence. Tribal love and loyalty were a hereditary transmission in my case, and also cultivated by every influence of early years.

"I thought Aunt Betsey had told me every single thing about the Blairs and her visits to Richmond," said I inly, with a swelling heart. "She might have trusted me not to repeat things which are not convenient to be spoken of"—Aunt Betsey's own phraseology,

after St. Paul. "I never even knew that *anybody's* servants cared so much to be free that they would kill their masters to get rid of them. I shall never trust one of them again—never! They're as bad as Robespierre's Frenchmen—every bit!"

I saw Mr. Bradley and Aunt Maria go down the path toward the Quarter; then Uncle Archie and Miss Virginia Dabney—he tall and dark, she blond and *petite*—follow them, talking earnestly. I even noted, with the shrewdness of a child whose chief associates are people much older than herself, how he looked down at her in holding back the little swing-gate at the foot of the lawn—just the same mixture of amusement, admiration and love I had seen in his countenance when she recalled the names of the archangelic twins. The four crossed the "branch" separating the hills, mounted the farther of the two, and disappeared in the pine woods crowning it. Uncle Wythe brought out his school-books—a formidable pile—established himself upon the porch steps, and began studying the morrow's lessons. I had tasks to prepare, too; and Mr. Bradley, although kind and helpful, was strict. But I sat still, miserable and half angry. Aunt Betsey picked up the key basket from the floor when she had rolled up her stocking tightly and stuck the needles into the ball.

"Peggy!" she called from the end of the piazza nearest the kitchen, "it is time to get out supper."

She went across the yard to the store-room, where barrels of flour, meal, sugar, rice and salt were kept with bags of coffee, tubs of lard, soap, starch, candles and other groceries. I seldom failed to follow her in these visits, sugar, raisins and stick cinnamon being dainties to a country-bred child. They did not tempt me in my present mood. Mam Peggy joined her at the store-room door, bread-tray and sifter in hand. Pre-

sently I heard from the kitchen the thump of the rolling-pin on the biscuit-block. I loved beaten biscuit, and none others so well as those I made myself of the bits thrown off in the beating and caught up as perquisites of the gleaner. The thought of them turned me sick now. Grandma sat in her straight-backed chair and knitted her lamb's-wool sock, the embodiment of placid ease and holy content.

I propped my elbows on my knees, my chin in my hands, and tugged at the suddenly-tangled threads of thought and anticipation until two tears, round as beads, broke splashingly upon the story of the naughty boy who ate the "pretty plant with a small white flower."

Had not Grandma spoken of rivers of blood that must have followed the course of servile insurrection? Had not Uncle Archie affirmed that the only preventive of such a catastrophe was to free the slaves? Had not Grandma, who never uttered idle words, declared their being here at all to be a wrong for which we must pay dearly, if it were not set right?

Yet, were not my grandmother, my parents—all of my kith and kin—slave-owners up to this very eighth month of the year of our Lord 1831?

"IT'S ME, MISS JUDITH," SHE SAID.—p. 37.

CHAPTER III.

"WAKE up, honey! What 's the marter with you?"

It was not quite dark when I went to bed. I remembered watching the fading into ashy gray of one pink cloud resting long and motionless against the pale-blue sky above the top of the big walnut tree in front of the house. The wide-flung masses of green were the last thing I saw at night, the first in the morning. There had been solace in the familiar outlines, comfort and hope in their stability, on this particular evening. But for them I could not have borne to go to my room alone. I said my prayers at the window that looked into the branches. It seemed but a few minutes thereafter when Mammy stood by my bed with a candle in her hand.

"It 's me, Miss Judith," she said soothingly. "You 've had a mighty bad night-m'yar'. I heerd you all the way down to Mistis' room, an' come up to look arfter you."

I sat upright, staring at her, and pushed my wet hair back with both hands. My face was dripping with cold sweat.

"Oh, Mammy!" I gasped, "I thought I was in the middle of Gabriel's insurrection, and Jack Bowler was about to kill me! You wouldn't let him! *You* wouldn't hurt me, would you? Mammy! Mammy!"

I threw myself upon her neck with the cry and sobbed violently. She set down the candle, seated herself on the bedside and gathered me into her arms.

"Who 's been a-scarin' you, Miss Judith?" I heard

her say when, by patting, cooing and rocking, she had calmed my hysterical paroxysm. "It 's wicked in grown folks to talk to chillen 'bout sech things. I can't think who 's had the heart to do it. Your Ma wouldn't like it ef she was to hear it."

"Nobody told me—nobody talked to me. Aunt Betsey was telling the others on the back porch this evening. They didn't think about my being there. I never knew such dreadful things could be! I feel as if I could never be happy again—never have another good night's rest. It 's like walking over the—*bad place!*"

I hurried it all over in a shuddering whisper. The monosyllabic name of the locality and the title of the master of the region were "swear words" to me as a Presbyterian child. That I alluded thus plainly to either, showed how intense was my excitement.

Mammy was silent. The quartette of young people who had occupied the back piazza in the afternoon was now convened in the square front porch, and, as I ceased speaking, began to sing. Aunt Maria's fresh voice led a three-part fugue in what was then known as the tenor—what we call now the treble or soprano:

"O send Thy light to guide my feet."

The base picked up the burden at the fourth word, the treble (the modern tenor) at the sixth, and went chasing one another through twenty bars:

"O send Thy light to guide my feet,
And bid Thy truth appear;
Conduct me to Thy holy hill,
To taste Thy mercies there."

They had never sung the fugue before without notes, and went through it again and again, led by Mr. Bradley. I had seen such rehearsals so often that I pictured to myself just how he was standing on the lowest step of the porch, facing the group upon the upper, and

beating time with his tuning-fork. I followed them once until all brought up on the long-held "open note" at the close. Then I began to wonder why Mammy sat so still, her back to the light, her head bowed upon her breast. Me she had put down upon the pillow, when she had turned and shaken it, and was now fanning me in slow, long sweeps with a turkey-feather fan.

I touched her timidly.

"You are not mad with me, Mammy!"

"Mad, chile! did you ever know me to be mad 'long you sence you was born? I was the firs' to dress you in this pore, sinful worl', honey. I had washed an' dressed your ma in the same way befo' you. Sometimes I've wondered ef 'twouldn't 'a' been kinder jes' to put you out o' your misery then an' there. You 'd 'a' gone straight home. An' the yearth is got so crooked nowadays!"

"That would have been murder," was my sensible comment.

"True, chile. An' I couldn't 'a' brung myself to hurt a h'yar of your sweet head. There is them that kills both soul an' body. Nobody ken hurt a baby's soul, thank the Lord! But when them that's old in sin an' years is sent to their account, 'wo unto him by whom the offense cometh!' Them 's Bible words! Seems like the worl' is a-gittin' so wuthless that the Almighty Himself won't be able to do nothin' with it but jes' to pitch it into the las' burnin'. Would you min' readin' a little piece out o' the Bible from the place Mars' Archibald read to-night at pra'rs?"

She brought book and candle from the table, slipped her arm under me to raise me to a sitting posture.

"It's 'bout wars an' all kinds o' trouble," she prompted, seeing me turn the leaves irresolutely. "St. Mark—he tells 'bout it."

Searching from chapter to chapter I happened upon it:

"And when ye hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled, for such things must needs be; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles; these are the beginnings of sorrows."

I was going on with the next verse, but she gently withdrew the volume.

"That 'll do, honey! That 's as much as I ken take at a time. I reckon I 'd better blow the light out. The candle-bugs is mighty troublesome at this season of the year. But I 'll set by you 'tel you go to sleep, seein' you 're kind o' res'less to-night."

She settled herself in a chair at my bedside and began rubbing my feet and ankles gently to allay my nervousness. By the starlight and the faint, purple shimmer that does not leave the August sky until near the dawn, I could see the outlines of her tall, powerful figure swaying slightly as she rubbed, her white turban nodding in the gloom like a bursting cotton-pod swayed by the breeze. The fugue was raised more confidently from below stairs.

> "O send Thy light,
> O send Thy light,
> O send Thy light to guide my feet!"

"That 's a good pra'r!" observed Mammy presently. "But when all 's said an' done, thar 's no gittin' 'round nor rubbin' out them words you read—'sech things must needs be.' 'Twould be easier to b'ar ef we onderstood better the why an' wharfo'. 'Tought to be 'nough to feel that the Lord knows, an' has got hole of the handle that moves the univarse. But we 're mighty weak an' doubtful cre'turs. An' the ole Satan, he 's all the time a-movin' an' a-seekin' an' a-roarin' an' a-

devourin'. Thar ain't no sign of his bein' caught, much less chained, for a long time to come. Lord!"—she lifted her arms in the darkness, as if to lay hold of the Unseen Strength—"Lord! how long! how long!"

"What has happened, Mammy?" The gesture and the heavy sadness of her tone struck me as peculiar. "What is going to happen?"

She quieted down in an instant, rubbing me as before.

"The Lord knows, dearie; I don't! His holy will *will* be done 'mong the 'habitants of the yearth whatever we may say and think. He ken make the wrath an' foolishness an' even the blood-guiltiness of men to praise Him. S'pose now," rousing herself to brisker speech and manipulation, "I was to tell you a story to put you to sleep? 'Tain't right for little ladies to lay 'wake 'tel all times o' night."

I nestled satisfiedly among my pillows. Mammy's stories were a never-stale delight. When I was a mere baby I learned from her the folk-lore made famous, in this our day, by "Uncle Remus'" recapitulations. When I outgrew the fables of "Brer Rabbit" and "Brer B'ar," she had tales of real life—a bountiful supply, valued all the more that she dealt them out to few. Without austerity her demeanor had a shade of reserve, her carriage a dignity that kept the would-be familiar at a distance. She was never merry with the child-like hilarity of her race, although never gloomy. Her voice was a mellow contralto, her speech ungrammatical and provincial, but never coarse. Her intonations were refined and very sweet, reminding strangers of the gracious gentlewoman in whose service she had lived for thirty years. Like my grandmother and my grand-aunt, she was a widow. Her only child, Uncle Archie's foster-brother, was the Summerfield "dining-room servant."

A tempting idea seized me.

"Tell me the whole story of your life, won't you? Make a *memoir* of it—a biography, Mammy, like Miss Hannah More's. I heard Grandma say to Mrs. Preston the other day: 'You know that I have an African princess on my plantation. I mean 'Ritta. She has French blood in her veins, too.' And Mrs. Preston said: 'That accounts for her being such a superior person. I am a firm believer in *blood.*' What did they mean?"

She drew the linen sheet gently over my limbs, straightened herself in her chair and folded her arms in unconscious stateliness.

"Mistis tole the truth. I've been hear my mother say, many a time, that her father was a king in his own country. Thar was fightin' and wars thar too. Sech bloody an' deceitful wars that sometimes they eat their enemies when they were took in battle, an' other times sole them to nigger-traders. One day my gran'father went to fight at the head of his army, and was took prisoner. He had the name of bein' a great warrior, and his enemies were 'fraid to let him loose. So they carried him down to the sho' whar a white folks' vessel was waitin' for a load o' mizzable fellow-bein's, an' sole him—my mother use' to declar'—for a kaig o' New England rum! He was passed from one plantation to another 'tel one o' the Reads bought him, and so he come into ole Marster's han's—he that was your great-gran'pa. I don'no' what the king was name' in his own country, but in Ameriky they called him 'Scipio,' and give him a surname, 'Africanus.' I remember it 'cause it was so much like the land he come from. It sounds sorter heathenish, too. But mos'ly he went by the title of 'Scip Read.' He didn't die 'tel I was mos' grown. I recklect him as plain as ef he had sot in the

chimbley cornder o' Mammy's house yes'day evenin' a-smoking' of his pipe, an' makin' us chillen' min'. He was black as sut' (soot), 'but he had a noble 'portment when he was nigh 'pon a hund'ed year ole. He was Marster's carridge-driver 's long as he could work, an' Marster and Mistis set a heap o' store by him.

"He warn't converted 'tel 'bout fifteen year befo' his death. Then he got through in a powerful revival of religion, the mos' wonderful ever seen 'bout here. 'Twas like a fresh in the creek. It swep' off a heap o' ole dry an' rotten logs that had been layin' so long on the bank folks had clean given 'em up. They say my pore ole gran'daddy he kneel down right in the meetin' an' shouted an' blessed God for the 'flictions of his youth, an' he a-holdin' up his han's with two fingers shot off o' one of 'em in the battle whar he was took pris'ner! When he come to jine the church he 'fessed to the preacher (ole Parson Watkins it was) that he never in all them years had laid down at night 'thout sayin' over a heathen charm that was certain to be-witch, an' mos' likely destroy the men that took him pris'ner an' the nigger-trader that bought him.

"'Now,' says he, 'the debbil done lef' my heart so clean an' sweet I ken pray for 'em all—blackaman an' whitey.'

"He allers spoke very uncorrect to the las'.

"Parson Watkins—he preach his funeral sermon from the tex', 'Ethiopia shall stretch out her han's unto the Lord.'

"But Mistis, she say she 'd ruther have had, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know here-after.'"

"What sort of charm was it, do you suppose? And could it really do anybody any harm?"

"I don'no', Miss Judith. In our Saviour's time the

Evil One had great power. He ain't los' it all, certain, an' he 's allers willin' an' a-waitin' to put his han' to any bad job. Thar 's many sensible persons believes in spells an' witches. I reckon the good is boun' to come out ahead in the long run, but it 's a tough race for awhile. Thar 's whar the 'mus' needs be' comes in again!" sighing deeply.

"Go on with your story, Mammy!" I nudged her as she was relapsing into revery.

"Sure 'nough, dear! Thinkin' comes easier than talkin' to people that are gittin' on in years. 'Pears like we 's gittin' use' to the las' sleep in the grave, whar thar 's no speech nor langidge. Firs', we don' hear so well; then, the eyes is darkened; then, the tongue gets slow an' heavy. All over us we 're bein' made ready for the silence an' the night. That 's the Lord's way o' preparin' His people for what mus' come —what we can't git shet of."

I fidgeted uneasily.

"That 's preaching, Mammy! I always skip the stupid-good parts of memoirs, even on Sundays. Tell me about your French blood. Was *your* father a French king?"

"He was a French servant, chile!" gravely. "My ole marster had a brother—Mars' Littleton Read—who went to France to finish his edication. This was befo' the long war, an' he stayed 'cross seas two years. When he come home he fetched with him a young French body-servant name' Francis Bernard. My mother was ole Mistis' maid, an' as likely a girl as could be foun' in this country or any other. So this Francis he fell in love with her, an' one day he come to Mars' Littleton, an' ask leave to marry her in good an' reg'lar style—same like she was a white woman. For that marter, he warn't so mighty fa'r himself, but mo' like a light

mulotter. Ole Marster an' Mistis they wouldn't hear on it for a long while, an' wanted Mars' Littleton to send his man away. But he said he couldn't do without him, an' *wouldn't.* He was dreadful sot in his ways, Mars' Littleton was, an' I reckon Francis had caught the same complaint. He wouldn't give up his notion, neither, an' kep' pesterin' his young marster, an' *he* a-dingin' at his brother, until bimeby ole Marster he had to give in. He sont for a white preacher though, an' ole Mistis she lent the bride her own weddin'-veil, an' had a beautiful supper for them, an' they war married 's fas' as the Gospel could marry 'em. Colored folks can't be married to anybody by law."

"Why not?"

"That 's one of the questions I can't answer, honey. I reckon 'cause a woman can't have two marsters, an' she 's born one man's property. Some folks say ef they war' married by law they couldn't never be separated nor sole apart. Some others say that ef a man on one plantation was to marry a woman on another by law, they would both have to go to the man's marster to avide confusion 'bout the children. I don' pretend to onderstan' how that mought be. All I know is white folks is married by law an' colored ones *ain't.* I've been hear tell, too, that ole Marster could 'a' been took up an' tried for 'lowin' the weddin', an' the preacher for marryin' a white man to a colored woman. Maybe folks warn't so particklar 'bout sech things in them ole times, when thar was Injins an' other wile cre'turs to to be fit" (fought). "Or maybe they counted a Frenchman no better than a colored person. Anyhow, he an' my mother was married, an' they lived as man an' wife for better 'n six years in the very same house whar I live now, out yarnder in the yard. They say he fixed it up beautiful. He planted grape-vines by the do', an'

fig trees at the end by the chimbley, an' sot out the butter an' eggs an' jonquils an' vi'lets that bloom soon in the spring, even now, under the front winder. He kep' the house whitewashed inside an' out, an' put up shelves an' cubberds an' all sorts o' conveniences. He warn't a Christyun though. The firs' thing I ken remember was him a-settin' on the do'step, playin' the fiddle an' a-learnin' me to dance to it, an' how my mother use' to run into the house an' cry when he wouldn't stop. She 'd been brought up to think 'twas a sin to play worldly tunes an' to dance. In his outlandish country everybody did it.

"Then Mars' Littleton he went for a soldier an' took my father with him. I reckon that was how he got into the notion of leavin' the plantation. Anyhow, when the war was over, he never come back. He an' another Frenchman stopped in Richmon' an' sot up in business thar. Both of 'em was peart fellows, an' they 'd picked up a right smart chance of money an' idees sence they come to Ameriky. Mars' Littleton he died the las' year o' the war, an' Francis writ a very polite note to ole Marster to say that there warn't no sense in his makin' his home on the plantation any longer. Nex' thing we had news that he was gittin' on wonderful in town, makin' money, an' very pop'lar with everybody. But not a word from him for my mother or anybody else.

"Ole Marster an' Mistis died in the one year, an' Mars' Sterling, your gran'pa, had the ole place, an' pretty soon he brought his wife home, an' she took a heap o' int'rust in my mother an' me. She writ to a frien' of hers in Richmon' to inquire 'bout Mr. Francis Bernard in a quiet sort o' way. 'Twouldn't 'a' been no use to try to git him back seein' they warn't married by law. Back came word that he was mighty respectable, an' in a fa'r way to be a rich man, an' how he was jes'

been married to a very nice lady—pore, but of a pretty good family."

"Mammy! how cruel! how wicked! when his first wife was living! Why, that is *sin!*" cried I, summing up the case in the concluding word.

"Sin" to us meant more than error or fault. It was a specific, not a generic term, and signified downright infraction of some section of the Decalogue.

"We jes' had to b'ar it, Miss Judith. Man's law couldn't tech him. Bein' a onbeliever, he didn't consider the law of his God. He mought go on a-flourishin' like a green bay tree, with none to moles' or make him 'fraid. 'Tain't often that the Lord himself speaks out d'reckly an' loud when He sees sech wickedness. Ef He says to himself sentence ag'inst the evil work, we ain't none the wiser 'tel His time for punishment is full an' ripe. Then comes the weepin' an' wailin' an' gnashin' o' teeth. The Lord's thoughts ain't our thoughts, nor His day our 'n."

The moon was peeping at me through the lower boughs of the walnut tree. The fugue burst out anew—was carried on evenly, in good time and tune, to the close. We stopped our talk to listen.

"O send Thy light!"

began Aunt Maria, tenderly fervent.

"O send Thy light!"

came in Uncle Archie's base, steady and resonant as a drum.

"O send Thy light!"

followed the young Northerner's better-trained but lighter voice, with some sacrifice of expression to musical accent.

The confluent harmony fulfilled my childish ideal of angelic quiring.

"I think the new song must sound very much like that," said I, when the last note had throbbed into silence that, to my fancy, waited for more.

"My pore mother 's been a-singin' it for this many a year," responded Mammy.

"Did she die of a broken heart?"

"No, honey. Workin' people—plain, every-day folks—don't gen'rally. They can't take time for the disease to run its course. For all that, 'twas pitiful to hear her sobbin' an' prayin' in the dead o' night when she thought everybody was 'sleep. I never let on to her that she woke me up sometimes! Thar warn't no yearthly power that could lift so much as the little end o' her cross. 'Twas strapped an' buckled on too tight for her to shake it off long as she lived. She mought a married two or three times, bein' considered the same as a widder, but she said 'No!' right up an' down when asked, an' Mistis wouldn't 'low her to be pestered by the men. She allers stood out that my mother was right not to think o' sech things."

"Of course she did!" interjected I, indignantly.

"Some ladies would a felt an' talked different to a likely young woman. I 'd been married ten year when my mother went away for good from this worl' o' sin an' misery. Mistis was with her when she died, an' closed her eyes with her own han's. Then she stood lookin' at her, the tears runnin' down her sweet face.

"'Good an' faithful!' says she. 'Good an' faithful unto death! She 's entered into the joy o' her Lord, Ritta!' says she to me. 'But you have lost a mother, an' I one o' my best frien's.'

"She helped me shroud the pore, weary body in one o' her own gowns. She thought everything o' her, Mistis did!

"The night befo' she died, my mother had a long talk

with me 'bout my father. She hadn't named him to me in more 'n twenty years. Then 'twas she tole me that my real name was Marguerita. I hadn't never known it befo'.

"'It 's French,' says she, 'an' he named you arfter his mother. He was mighty proud an' fond o' his firs' baby. 'Fever you git a chance to speak to him tell him how free I forgiv' him on my death-bed, an' how I hope he 'll be happy here an' hereafter. He wouldn't keer, maybe, to meet me in heaven,' says she, 'an' it 's likely his white wife would be more suitable-like for him in this worl' an' the nex'. But he needn't stay out o' the kingdom on that account. The houses thar is many an' wide. I 'spose he mought walk 'bout the golden streets for a million year without comin' 'cross me without he chose to meet me. I wouldn't git in his way. I been hear tell,' says she, kinder wishful-like, 'how Mr. Baptist preached one day to the colored people at Red Lane Church that thar would be kitchens in heaven jes' like 'tis here, an' that if we are good servants on yearth we may be 'lowed to tote up water from the river o' life for the white folks' table. But Mistis, she say that ain't so—that we 'll all be free an' equil thar. I don'no' 'bout that! Don't 'pear jes' right for me to sit 'longside o' a lady like her even at the marridge-supper o' the Lamb,' says she.

"'The Lord will manage so 's you shell feel easy an' happy wherever you are in the New Jerus'lem, Mammy,' says I, for I see she was beginnin' to wander in her min'.

"She giv' a little smile an' turned her face over to the pillow, jes' like a chile goin' to sleep.

"'You won't forgit my messidge to your father,' says she, 'an' how I won't bother him no more in time nor eternity?'

"So I promised her, solemn an' sure.

"But Richmon' is a good many mile off from here, an' Mistis didn't git away from home often. Three years was gone before I could take the trip. At las' Mistis went down one spring to visit her cousins, the Blairs and Pleasantses, an' Mrs. Governor Wood, an' carried me with her. She 'd tole me whar my father lived, an' I didn't forgit it. The day arfter we got to town I asked her mought I go out for a walk, an' hunted 'bout 'tel I foun' the street an' the house. 'Twas on Church Hill, an' a very nice brick house with guarden an' orchard an' all. I thought in a minute to myself 'twas likely *he 'd* planted the flowers an' grape-vines an' fig trees. Thar was a pretty summer-house one side of the guarden, with a table an' a cheer in it. I could jes' 'magine mos' as plain as ef I 'd seen him how he 'd sot thar warm evenin's smokin' an' readin'. I walked up an' down, up an' down, for much as half an hour befo' that house tryin' to find heart for to go in. I shuck all over like I had a chill when I thought o' meetin' my father. 'Twan't that I loved him exactly, but I reck'lected him holdin' me on his knee an' singin' me to sleep, an' how my mother had been bound up in him, an' it all come back 'pon me in a rush. Bimeby, jes' as I stopped at the gate to try to steady my mind, a lady come out on the porch an' called to me.

"'Come in!' says she, friendly an' pleasant as could be. 'I saw you pass several times, like you was a-lookin' for somebody,' says she. 'Can I do anything for you?'

"'I 'm lookin' for Mr. Francis Bernard, ma'am,' says I. 'I 'd like to speak to him.'

"She turned as white as the wall, an' sot right down on the porch bench.

"'You haven't heard, then, that he 's dead!' says

"SHE CAME T'WARD ME SO FIERCE, WITH HER HAN' UP."—p 51.

she. 'He has been in his heavenly home a year this spring. He was my dear, *dear* husband!'

"With that she pulled out her handkerchief an' began to cry.

"I 'd dropped down on the other bench an' couldn't have spoke a word ef my life had depended on it.

"'His heavenly home!' thinks I. 'How positive she says it! Who knows but he has had my mother's messidge long befo' this time?'

"Presen'ly she wipes her eyes, an' says she, a-smilin' in a sorrowful way:

"'What did you want with him? Can I do anything for you? What is your name, an' whar do you come from?'

"'My name is Marguerita Bernard, ma'am,' says I. 'My mistis is Mrs. Read of Summerfield, —— County.'

"Jes' as I said it, I see two young ladies standin' in the do' behind me. One of them steps forward before her mother could speak. She had a dark skin and big black eyes. The other was fa'r like the mother.

"'Who is this woman, mother?' said the dark one, very haughty-like. 'Did your mistress send you here? An' what is your business with Mrs. Bernard?'

"Something biled up in me. I riz right up, straight 's an' arrow, an' faced her, an' says I:

"'The Lord do so to me, an' mo' also, ef I 'm tellin' anything but the downright truth! My mother was married to yo' father in the sight o' God an' His angels befo' yo' father ever see yo' mother, an' I 'm his chile!'

"I thought she would a hit me, she come t'ward me so fierce with her han' up. But her mother she ketched holt o' her.

"'Marguerita, be still!' says she.

"It went through me like a shot that he 'd made no 'count o' me, but called another chile arfter his mother.

"'It 's all true!' says Mrs. Bernard. "He tole me 'bout it years ago, when he 'd a spell of sickness an' thought he was dyin'. I forgiv' him then; the Lord forgiv' him arfterward. If he had sinned, he repented. Who am I that I should judge him?'

"She made me come into the house, an' had a long talk with me, an' showed me my father's pictur'. Then she giv' me a nice snack to eat, an' asked me to call an' see her whenever I come to town. Nobody could a behaved kinder than she did. She's dead, too, now. She was a good Christyun if ever one lived. I been hear that her daughters has married mighty well. I shan't never bother them ag'in; but I wish 'em well."

"But, Mammy, they are your sisters!"

"In one way, honey—but that don't count for much in this one-sided world.

"That makes me say what I do say," she resumed thoughtfully after a pause; "that it don't stan' to reason as everything ken be sot straight and satisfactory here. 'Tain't man, whose breath is in his nostrils, who is got the right to overturn an' overturn an' overturn, no marter how upside-down things may look to be. That's the Lord's business, an' we ain't no call to pull it out o' His han's befo' He 's half done with it an' ready to trust it to us for the finishin' off. You ken sew a right straight seam an' hem when Mistis or Miss Betsey has fixed it an' basted it down. 'Twould be foolish an' disrespec'ful in you to undertake the whole job, an' you know it well enough not to try it. The kingdom of heaven ain't the only thing we 've got to receive like little children. It 's one thing to *say*, 'His will be done,' an' another to *suffer* it!"

CHAPTER IV.

I WAS busy next morning with my neglected lessons, my feet curled up under me on a rug laid in the shadiest corner of the back porch, when Miss Virginia Dabney came out to me. I raised my eyes from the dog-eared "Emerson's Arithmetic." In a close tussle with a new rule I had caught the click of her slipper-heels on the hall-floor, and thrilled to the square toes of my thick shoes. There is an almost piteous strain in the worshipful regard of a little girl for a beautiful young woman. It may be the eager, unconscious recognition of the possible apotheosis of her immature self, such as quickens the sluggish pace of the caterpillar brushed by the wing of a passing butterfly.

This city maiden—whose toilettes were a wonder in themselves to my rustic appreciation, whose smiles were so free and sweet, her spirits so buoyant that she seemed to me to glorify a room by entering it—was just now my terrestrial goddess. I crimsoned with untold delight when she accosted me suddenly with one of the endearing terms she uttered more easily than did my kinspeople; her touch was a benefaction, her kiss an ecstacy. She had never been prettier than on this summer morning. No pink-tipped daisy fresh from an English dew-bath could be fairer and brighter.

She wore a gown of fine white dimity, her shoulders being covered by a small cape, crossing the chest in front, leaving bare a bewitching triangle at the neck, almost as purely white as the fabric. Shoulder-puffs were met by long cambric sleeves, which could be un-

buttoned and slipped off at the pleasure of the wearer. These were finished at the wrists by narrow crimped ruffles of linen lawn. The cape was trimmed with the same, and a broader frill edged the skirt. Ill-natured critics spoke of her hair as "red," but she had no feeling on the subject of her bright locks. They were soft, luxuriant, and curled as naturally as woodbine tendrils, being susceptible of many varieties of effective arrangement. She might well be content with them, even had they not set off to such advantage the exquisite clearness of her complexion and contrasted harmoniously with the blue of her eyes.

"Good-morrow, my little Sweetbrier," she said, tripping up to me to tap my cheek with a taper forefinger.

She was never prodigal of her kisses, nor was osculation so common—I might add, so cheap—a ceremony then as now in the most affectionate families.

My Uncle Wythe had nicknamed me "Brier" when I was five and he ten years old. In a pitched battle for supremacy he had boxed my ears. I fastened one hand in his hair, the nails of the other upon his face. I was very much ashamed of the story and of the long scar, like an untimely wrinkle, crossing his freckled cheek. But I still *hated* him when he used the unlucky word in teasing or rebuke. Miss Virginia's amiable tact had drawn the sting from this a year ago, when he had goaded me to stormy but ineffectual tears. She scolded him—still sweetly—for "persecuting a little girl," and taking me upon her lap, averred "that Sweetbrier was her favorite flower, in bloom and out. It was sweet and spicy, and no more thorny than was necessary to keep rude boys at a distance. She meant to call me by no other name."

Uncle Archie was a spectator of the scene, and the

next day transplanted a thrifty root of sweetbrier from the woods to a bed of prepared soil beside the front porch, Miss Virginia superintending the pretty bit of horticulture. It had taken root forthwith and flourished apace. Uncle Archie had the "lucky touch" with roots and slips. They grew when and wherever he set them.

While she looked over my shoulder now, with kindly offers of assistance gratefully and conscientiously declined, he joined us, a spray of sweetbrier—a rose, two buds and a cluster of the odorous leaves—in his hand. He offered it to her, smiling silently, when "Good mornings" had been exchanged.

"It grows lovelier every day," said she, accepting the gift without spoken thanks.

She inhaled the breath of the opened flower long enough for my eyes—and perhaps others—to note how perfectly the pale rose-tint matched her cheeks, then pinned it at the top of her corsage, where it rested against the pearly skin. I thought how few women could risk the contrast safely, and how free from vain imaginations was this paragon of her sex.

The pair began a slow promenade of the porch while awaiting the summons to prayers. I tried faithfully to concentrate my powers of observation upon Emerson and the day's sums (we did not call them "examples"). I did keep my eyes upon the page and my lips moved in mechanical iteration. In the calm light of day and the steady progress of a restored train of ideas, I had compunctious visitings as to yesterday's eavesdropping. I would hear nothing now—if I could help it—that was not directed with conscious intent, to my ears. Yet whence was I, inquisitive little sinner that I was, to draw the moral courage to exclude from these organs the trickle of such tempting sentences as were projected toward me with each turn of their stroll

at my end of the piazza? Hearing, I could not but heed; heeding, I laid up and pondered then and remember now.

"You are unjust to yourself. Indeed, you have never had justice done you!" The deliverance was so silvery distinct that it reached me from the other extremity of the promenade. "I am angry whenever I recollect that you had to give up the hope of an education and settle down at nineteen to a farmer's life."

"An education" meant a collegiate course. The Reads belonged to what Dr. Holmes has taught us to call the "Brahmin Caste"—"that in which aptitude for learning is congenital and hereditary. Their names," he goes on to say, "are always on some college catalogue or other. They break out every generation or two in some learned labor which calls them up after they seem to have died out."

Young as I was, I understood that not to be college-bred was very near akin to loss of caste; shrank from the touch on a sore place at this overt allusion to what was seldom mentioned in the family. Mammy and Aunt Betsey had, between them, let me into the secret, enjoining discretion upon me, as it was "a great grief to Grandma."

"It was unavoidable," I heard Uncle Archie say, with no haste of self-vindication, but rather as if allaying another's disappointment.

Again the silvery, somewhat thin voice in reply:

"Yes, I know! Maria told me one day last year—how it was decided that, since your mother could afford, at that time, to educate but one of you, you, as the eldest son, should of course enter college; how, the very day before you were to set out—after your trunk was packed—you happened to find Sterling lying flat on his face in the woods, crying—"

The rest was lost in the distance. When they neared me again Uncle Archie was speaking.

"He has fine talents. I knew this then as well as I do now that he has proved by his college career what stuff he is made of. He will be a man of mark should his life be spared. I deserve no credit for what you call a sacrifice. I should have committed a *crime* had I—"

The girl came to a full stop midway in the porch at their next round; set her foot down hard and looked at him, eyes flashing and lips pouting.

"I can't *bear* to hear you say that, Mr. Read! 'No talent to speak of!' You 'lay claim to nothing better than hard, common sense!' *Don't* you know that stupid, ordinary people—and so many of those we meet *are* stupid and ordinary!—will take you at your own valuation? will believe your slanders of yourself? Mr. Sterling Read is very brilliant, I've no doubt, but his mind is no better or stronger than yours. Why *will* you fret me by insisting upon the contrary? Don't I *know* you?"

Italics convey no just sense of the eloquent shades of emphasis, nor would a word-portrait of the changeful face uplifted to the morning light. The pale rose was damask red, her eyes gleamed moistily. She plucked, nervously, leaf after leaf from a jasmine streamer, to throw them on the floor. Her little slipper beat the devil's tattoo on the oaken boards.

Uncle Archie stood looking at her until I felt that I must jump up and run away. With fragments of old novels drifting through my mind, I should not have been astonished to see him drop upon one knee and break forth into three pages of rhapsodical declaration. Then, before I could gather up limbs and book for escape, he seemed to take hold of himself, to curb something that strained and tore at the rein. So tremendous was the mental battle that his bronzed cheek grew sal-

low, one big, forked vein stood out turgidly in his forehead, his hands unclosed and clenched as in a spasm. He swallowed hard, as the girl's eyes gradually sank under his; wet his lips with his tongue before he spoke—very quietly and deliberately even for him, who was seldom impulsive or rash of utterance.

"You are very good to think so well of me. But I am not affecting humility when I say that my brothers are more gifted than I, intellectually. I liked to study when at school. They love learning for its own sake. They speak fluently and effectively. I handle my mother tongue with difficulty, and know no other, having forgotten the little Latin and less Greek drilled into me when a boy. The bent of my mind is practical. I think I shall make, in time, a tolerable planter. I could never succeed at the law as Sterling will, or in the ministry as Wythe will, should he hold to his purpose of becoming a preacher. He has always nursed this notion"—laughing a little to relieve the stiffness both were beginning to feel and show—"ever since he used to collect the little negroes under the big walnut tree and preach to them against the sin of eating clay. For two centuries there has never been wanting in our family a man to stand before the Lord. Each generation has had one or more ministers of the gospel."

"I know it is a way they have!" She was fingering the upper rail of the balustrade as she would a keyboard, gazing into the distance. "It is a noble profession."

"The highest man can follow," responded Uncle Archie as sententiously.

"You would have made a *good* minister, yet *preferred* to be a farmer!"

"I obeyed the call as I heard it."

"Ah, well, there is no use wishing now, I suppose!"

She tossed out both plump hands with the action of one who puts aside something definitely and decidedly. The sweetbrier rose, blown to the full, was shaken by the motion, and a rain of loosened petals fell, unnoticed by either, among the strewn jasmine leaves.

"Doing is better than wishing—as a rule," said Uncle Archie, still avoiding looking directly at her—"but less pleasant."

His eyes were fixed on the pine crown of the opposite hill. Their expression robbed the words of commonplaceness. Neither of the twain seemed to address the other in these latter sentences. I saw Miss Virginia steal one look at him, questioning, pleading, as loath to believe herself foiled or mistaken.

A bell tinkled in the hall, and I arose to follow them to the parlor. Miss Virginia walked on to the open front door, paused for an instant there, waiting until Aunt Maria should join her. The sunlight, creeping aslant across the polished floor, struck full on her face, and I was shocked at its pallor—a strange, bluish tint touching her very lips. Was she angry with Uncle Archie? Had he wounded her to the heart? She looked just as usual when she took her place beside her friend in the silent group at the top of the long room. The house-servants, eight in number, including Mammy and "Mam" Peggy, the cook, ranged themselves near the entrance; Uncle Archie had the armchair that had been his father's. A round stand at his right hand supported the Family Bible, the leathern covers black with age and glossed by handling. His mother sat nearest him on one side, Aunt Betsey next to her.

"Looking forth as the morning, fair as the sun, clear as the moon!" repeated I, inly, in surveying them.

Their white hands, beautiful still in form and tex-

ture, were folded upon their mourning-dresses. Caps and frilled tuckers were pure and crisp. The sisters never looked hot in summer, or cold in winter. Just now their thoughts and hearts were fixed, their eyes deep and clear with holy calm.

Uncle Archie was not yet twenty-seven, yet no one saw incongruity in his position as patriarch and priest of the household. Sedate beyond his years with the pressure of premature care and thought-taking for others, his mother's strong right arm, the guardian and mentor of three younger children, he yet bore himself with the chastened reverence of a youthful disciple in the High Presence to which he now summoned others.

The service began with a hymn, given out two lines at a time, and sung by us all, Mr. Bradley raising and leading the tune of "Mear."

> "Lord! in the morning Thou shalt hear
> My voice ascending high;
> To Thee will I direct my prayer,
> To Thee lift up mine eye."

Aunt Betsey sang tenor. We children called it "the tribble," and were proud of her accomplishment. It was a part much affected by musical ladies of her generation. At forty, her voice was clear and sound. I never hear old "Mear," "St. Anne's," "China," or "Dundee," without fancying that I discern her bell-like rendering of the highest notes of the staff, the tuneful rise above the other voices of certain bars in which she felt especially at home, an occasional holding and slurring not set down in the score, as if she loved some passages too well to let them go at once. She warbled as a bird sings, chin and brow slightly upraised, lips just parted, eyes steady and serene, and was followed at harmonious distances by air and counter, all upborne and marshaled by Uncle Archie's base, firm and true like himself.

It was the custom in Presbyterian families to take the Bible "in course" at morning prayers, one long chapter or two short ones each day, leaving the selection of the chapter read at evening to the reader's judgment. We had begun with Genesis on New Year's Day. The nineteenth chapter of Second Kings was the portion in order for this morning. Uncle Archie read in his round, clear voice, with no pretense of elocutionary effect, all the thirty-seven verses. If there had been seventy-four we should have had the unabated tale of Scripture. The fashion of hanging illuminated texts on the walls of living-rooms had not then been invented, but above the high mantel of the dining-room was a framed sentence written in paled ink on yellowing paper—

"PRAYER AND PROVENDER HINDER NO MAN'S JOURNEY."

Sterling Read, my grandfather, had penned it in bold, clerkly characters for the admonition of children, servants and guests.

There was time for thirty-seven-verse Bible readings and stately-phrased petitions and well-grounded beliefs in that age when sewing, spinning, reaping and threshing were done by hand. We hearkened, one and all, to the history of Hezekiah's grievous strait in view of the threatened invasion of the Assyrians. How he spread the matter before the Lord and received gracious promises of deliverance; held our breaths in awe and thankfulness at the finale in which was portrayed with sublime brevity the overthrow of the enemies of the Daughter of Zion, the blasphemers of the Holy One of Israel.

"And it came to pass in that night that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were

all dead corpses," said the quiet, deliberate accents of the reader.

The eyes of all were riveted upon his visage, and while the words were passing his lips a sudden stir of breaths—not one of us moving hand, foot or head—was perceptible in the hushed room. It was, as I have said, a long parlor. Full white curtains with knotted fringes were looped away from the windows, of which there were four. Those at the back were shaded by the piazza. About the front clambered a riotous growth of roses. The air was laden with their breath and that of the lilies banked at their roots. As Uncle Archie read the verse above quoted, a vagrant pencil of sunlight pierced the woven branches and struck his cheek. It broadened into a beam, the lower part shivering on his shoulder and spotting his gray coat and vest with the blue-green tint that changed his healthful complexion to ghastliness. There was not an exclamation at the phenomenon. In profound ignorance of it, he gave the two verses that remained of the chapter, closed the book upon "And Esarhaddon, his son, reigned in his stead," adjusted the ribbon book-mark, laid the Bible on the stand, and arose to his feet. The baleful beam and blotches quivered and glanced with the movement, touching his hands and white pantaloons, and when he knelt, rested on his black hair. Peeping between the fingers with which I decorously barred my face, I saw the clustering masses take on the greenish lustre of a crow's wing as he began, in low, measured tones, never employed on secular occasions, the customary formula:

"*Almighty and Most Merciful God, our Heavenly Father.*"

After that the power of listening was denied to me. It was wicked and without precedent in a girl who knew herself to be, as she had been told again and

again, "quite old enough to follow in her heart the petitions offered in church and at family worship," but I felt that I would rather die than not adventure a second look, just to make sure that I had not imagined the horrid hue. I opened a wider crack, twisted my body slightly to the left from my kneeling position in the shadow of Aunt Maria's chair. People took positions then at prayers the easiest compatible with devout decorum, for they were not to be varied without weighty cause until the "Amen!" was said. The breeze that had blown aside the branches was a smart puff that had not yet died out. Other streaks and splashes of sunshine were playing through the interstices. A green corona encircled the mob of Grandma's cap. Short, crooked rays, like fingers, clutched at Miss Virginia's shoulder. Aunt Betsey's calm profile, bent upon her clasped hands, was bathed in dye as deep as the color of a robin's egg, with variations of dull pea-green. While I stared, fascinated and horrified, I saw Miss Virginia lift her head slowly and glance around at Uncle Archie. Then her dilated eyes swept the whole company, and she shuddered aside from the crooking fingers, as if feeling as well as seeing them.

I lowered my hands in the instinctive desire for sympathy, if I could not get reassurance. Our regards met, asked of one another, "What does it mean?" and traveled in company around the room until we reached the kneeling row of servants. There we perceived what we had not before noticed in our intent observation of the semi-circle about the Bible-stand, that the window nearest the door being less densely overgrown than the others, let in a broader stream of light. The white curtains seemed to be lined with green, and between them a peak of cadaverous sunshine was cast upon the floor. Right in the centre of this knelt Michael, over a

wooden cricket he had brought in with him. Beyond his kneeling attitude he made no pretense of devotion. He grinned openly, half in terror, half in enjoyment of a novelty, when he caught our eyes; his eye-balls rolled from one to the other. Thirty years later I saw a Herculaneum bronze that brought back to me his aspect at that instant—a greenish-black satyr's head. His hair was an ugly thing to see. It was a bushy shock, well combed by his mother within an hour, and the light pierced it at the apex, changing it into the likeness of crisped grass writhing in the heat of an oven.

"*For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!*"

The speaker was the only person there utterly unconscious of any interruption of the solemnity of the service, yet it was significant of the training and manners of the day that none of us hurried the rising from our devout posture. Nor when we were upright did any one speak for a moment. We stood gazing about us spell-bound by the increasing strangeness of the spectacle. The glare and color were so much intensified since we knelt down that eyes just unclosed were immediately impressed with the phenomenon.

Mr. Bradley spoke first.

"Let us see what this means!" he said, walking quickly to the front door.

We trooped after him into the porch.

The tranquil landscape I had seen yesterday afternoon bathed in sunset smiles lay now like an accursed region. Uncle Archie used to liken it to the face of a man he had once seen dying of cholera, and to insist that hills and trees seemed shrunken and drawn, as were his features. The image is more apt than any other I can summon in the recollection. The sun shone in an unclouded sky. There was no haze about it, or on the most distant hills visible to us. The awful change was in the burning disk

itself, or in the light emitted by it. Some declared that both were blue, others that they were green. To this day the prodigy is referred to by eye-witnesses of it, sometimes as "the blue," sometimes as "the green days." The truth lay between these descriptions. The color changed from time to time, at irregularly recurrent intervals, and suddenly or gradually with like irregularity. For hours of morning, noon or afternoon it was a dingy blue, with the greenish reflections I have mentioned; again for whole hours the more portentous dull green prevailed. At times both faded into milder shades that promised a return of clear light. The effect was lugubrious and depressing throughout the continuance of what was esteemed inexplicable and ominous in the absence of knowledge of chemical analyses of sun-rays and scientific acquaintance with the possible vagaries of the source of heat and radiance.

"It is very singular!" mused Uncle Archie aloud, after going out as far as the yard gate to see if the tinge were generally diffused over heavens and earth.

"What you s'pose it means, Mars' Archie?"

The young master paused, his foot on the bottom step of the porch. At the corner of the house nearest the kitchen were collected the plantation negroes, fifty or more in number. Mothers had babies in their arms; men had come in from the fields with hoes, scythes and rakes in hand; two or three sick persons had arisen from bed and dressed hastily in the first garments that came to hand. The questioner was an old man in the front rank of the affrighted gang. He was attired in jacket and trousers of unbleached cotton homespun, and his hair was of the same yellowish-white. The ashes of age and alarm lay on his sooty forehead and cheeks.

"It arises from some peculiar state of the atmos-

phere, Uncle Windsor," returned Uncle Archie lightly. "It will probably pass away in a little while."

"You don't s'pose, den," tentatively, "dat it's one o' dem signs in de heaven above dat's to come 'pon de nations o' de yearth, sah, befo' de Las' Day?"

"I have no idea that it means anything of the kind, my good friend," in the same tone of easy good nature.

"Nor de token o' some heavy jedgment dat's goin' for to fall 'pon some folks somewhar, sah? Same-like de tower o' Sillyum, dat mashed eighteen?" the man drew nearer to say.

A low chorus of groans and "um-*hums!*" from the women ensued upon this erudite query. The signs of gathering excitement did not escape the master's notice. He glanced somewhat sternly at the palpitating throng, but his smile and voice were unchanged.

"The Lord writes His prophecies in plainer print than that, Uncle Windsor," waving his hand toward the sky. "He tells us that when He posts notices and puts up sign-boards for us there will be no danger of misunderstanding them; that 'the wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein, and he that runs may read.'"

The old man, privileged by age beyond the rank and file of his fellows, shook his head.

"But ain't we tole too, sah, dat in order to read 'em, we mus' hav de applyin' eye an' de seein' ear an' de willin' heart? 'Twon't do to trabbel through de yearth like moles, Mars' Archie, nor yit like bats, dat shets dey eyes an' goes to sleep in a holler tree soon 's de sun gits up. What you think we all better do 'bout dis yer' 'sturbance of de iliments?"

He, too, waved his hand upward, but oratorically.

The smile was a pleasant laugh.

"*I* am going in to breakfast. Those of you who have had yours may stop at the cider-press for a drink

as you go back to work. You, Uncle Windsor, can step to the kitchen and tell Mam Peggy to give you a cup of coffee. Then take a comfortable smoke out there in the shade. Have you any tobacco?"

"We *was* a-thinkin' o' holdin' an all-day pra'r-meetin' sah," continued the spokesman, apparently deaf to the tempting suggestions. "ef so be de wrath o' de Almighty mought be turn' away, an' His fiery 'dignation be drawed back into Heaven. *For* I been hear dat de Good Book say, my young marster, how in dat day shall de sun be darken' an' de moon shell not give her light, an' de stars shell drap 'pon de yearth, same like de 'timely figs is shook off by de win'. 'Pears like I ken see mos' all dem things dis bery day," falling into the sing-song of the negro exhorter; "an' what dey say to one dey say to all, young an' old, bon' an' free, 'Prepar' to meet de Lord at His comin'! Turn to de Lord an' make his parths straight, an' t'ar yo' hearts an' not yo' guarments!' It 's sech a day as you think not maybe, Mars' Archie!"

An outburst of sighs, shrill groans and sobs from the women behind him was waxing into the swinging hum, like an inarticulate chant, common to the race in seasons of religious fervor, when Uncle Archie turned about sharply.

"None of that, there!" he said, authoritatively. "Eight hundred and thirty-one years ago, one thousand years after the birth of our Saviour, people got the idea into their heads that the end of the world was at hand. They held all-day prayer-meetings by the month, and repented and cried and waited for the sound of the trumpet until the fields they had not planted were high with weeds, and there was no bread to put into their children's mouths. Thousands starved to death. Now, hear me! I mean that the work of this planta-

tion shall go on as long as there is light enough to show the difference between cotton and tobacco, and for you to see the rows of corn. What concern would it be of yours if the sun should turn as blue as indigo! Leave all that to One wiser and mightier than we are, and be off to your business every one of you! If I were sure that this was the last day of the world I could give you no better advice than to do the day's work better than ever before. I can repeat Scripture, too, Uncle Windsor, and I remember that the Wise Man said, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it *with thy might!*'"

An expressive gesture in the direction of kitchen and quarters was the signal of dispersion. The crowd melted quietly away. In less than a minute the party on the porch were left to themselves. Uncle Archie mounted the steps.

"Is breakfast ready, mother?"

He wiped his forehead, moved and spoke as one weary or harassed.

Miss Virginia pinched my arm as Grandma led the way to the dining-room.

"Wasn't he *splendid?*" she whispered. "For all that—I don't dare let him know it—but I 'm scared out of my senses! I do believe that something is going to happen!"

CHAPTER V.

THE chariot of learning drove heavily that day. Our school-house was "the office," a small frame building in a clump of locust trees near the garden paling. Besides Uncle Wythe and myself there were eight pupils —four boys and as many girls—who came over every morning from neighboring plantations to enjoy the privilege of study under the Summerfield tutor.

The teachers employed by the Reads had had a somewhat remarkable record. Dr. Conrad Speece, an intimate friend of my grandmother, had called that one-roomed house under the locusts "the nursery of the Presbyterian clergy in Virginia," so many theological students had made it the half-way station to the exercise of their sacred calling, earning by teaching for a year or more the means with which to complete their scholastic course. It was generally conceded that the advantages of the position were extraordinary. More than one, or half a dozen eminent divines freely acknowledged their obligations to the queen of this little realm for benefits college and seminary could not give. From the riches of her motherliness she fed their bodies and hearts. Through her gentlehood she refined them. Out of the hid treasures of her Christian experience she furnished them for the life-work she dignified in their sight as the commission in the service of her King.

Mr. Bradley was a student of law, not divinity, and a graduate of Yale. He had come to Virginia and to Summerfield at the beginning of this year, recommended to my grandmother's good will by Dr. John H.

Rice, whose praise was in all the churches as a man of learning, zeal and piety. The tutor was of totally different type from his predecessors, but not one of them had won so distinguished a place in the favor of family and neighbors nor one showed more grateful appreciation of his incorporation as a part of the household.

He sat, on the first of the discolored days, in the arm-chair used by a long succession of tutors, a desk of equal antiquity at his elbow. A window at his other hand opened into a branchy nectarine tree. We were ranged on backless benches about him. Five double desks of unpainted pine, browned by time, notched, hacked, scratched and ink-spotted, were behind us when we faced him for recitation. While ciphering, writing and studying, we had bent over them before his induction into office. He was the first tutor who insisted that we should sit straight and also hold heads up and shoulders back in walking. His own carriage was singularly graceful and his person pleasing. Not so tall as Uncle Archie, he was more lithe, so erect in figure and elastic in step that he had the appearance of equal height. His hair was brown, as were his expressive eyes; his nose was straight, with thin, flexible nostrils; the mouth fine and sensitive, the lips parting readily in smiles over white, regular teeth; there was a cleft in his chin and a hint of waviness in the hair.

I should be conversant with all these particulars, having sketched his profile on stray bits of paper and copy-book covers on an average ten times a week for ten months. I can imagine now that he may have looked in that dingy school-room and among its clumsy, homely furnishings like a vase of choicest faïence doing duty as a kitchen ewer. No one perceived the incongruity while he filled the post. We were used to seeing men of noblest scholarship in the pulpits of churches

that had known neither painter's brush nor carver's tool, the pews of which were without cushions and the aisles carpetless. Men who had stood before kings and held sway in governmental councils walked the bare floors of hereditary halls with the courtly bearing learned in the minuet and practiced in foreign salons, vaulted to the saddle and rode in knightly fashion that recalled Sir Launcelot and the Black Prince. Never a word or look on Mr. Bradley's part evinced that there was aught novel in all this to his apprehension; still less that he was surprised at the cordiality, unalloyed by patronage, extended to himself by the best people in the county. He was a gentleman—ingrain. That was enough. Had he been personally less attractive he would still have been entitled to courteous treatment as a recognized part of the Summerfield family. There was no question of condescension on one side or of humility on the other.

He was especially benignant and companionable on this dreary forenoon. It is superfluous to mention that he had not a single perfect lesson from the shivering wretches who essayed to recite the tasks conned over night. Those who had gone to bed knowing every line and word and slept the sleep of the well-doer fared no better than the rest. The altered face of Nature made dunces of us all. We could not have mustered two whole ideas among us unless allowed to exchange confidences upon the mutations of the horrible garb cast about the outer world. The very tree we had watched day by day, each between his or her "turns" in geography, history and dictionary lessons until we knew every glossy leaf as well as we had known every curve and knot of naked boughs and twigs in winter time, could have told the exact number of ripening nectarines in July and the now useless stalks where these had hung

—even this familiar friend wore a jaundiced and forbidding aspect. The brown bark was edged with faint blue films, as if seen through a prism; the foliage was of a uniform and disagreeable color, and hung heavily motionless as noon drew near. Cicada and tree-toad were mute. The grasshopper's rattle and whirr in the sun-parched sward that had grated on our ears yesterday would have been welcome in the dead stillness of a sickly earth fainting under the eye of a sickly sun.

I bore it without outcry, but with sinking heart, chilled hands and feet, until it was almost time for recess—"intermission," Mr. Bradley taught us to term it, instead of "play-time." Then, when the bethumbed and smeared slate, filled on one side with my trial-sum in long division, was given back to me with a reluctant, "You had better try it once more, Judith," pronounced in the tutor's gentlest voice, I burst into a passion of sobs.

"My dear little scholar!" exclaimed Mr. Bradley, "I did not scold. I do not wonder that you did not get it right the first time, nor that you do not feel like studying to-day. Everything will come straight to-morrow."

I had heard him say it scores of times, for his was a cheerful philosophy that never faltered. Now it failed to console me. The emotions and events of the past twenty-four hours had worn my nerves to the raw quick. I could not check my tears; and Elvira Clarke, a delicate girl of fourteen, began to snivel behind her handkerchief in sympathy.

"The school is dismissed!" said the teacher, and when the rest had gone, picked me up in his arms and ran across the yard to Uncle Archie's room.

It was on the first floor, and in the wing adjoining his mother's apartment—"the chamber," as it was

called in country houses. Here we were sure to find the ladies of the household, with one or two colored seamstresses at this hour of the day. Uncle Archie had not returned from his morning round of the plantation, as my bearer knew. He carried me around by a side door into the quiet room, laid me on the bed, and went to look for fresh water and Aunt Maria. It was natural for hurt and troubled things to turn to her. I was clutching at my throat when he returned with her—sitting upright, because I feared to choke to death if I lay down, too much terrified at my own sensations to think of what had induced the seizure. Aunt Maria had brought the invariable hartshorn and administered a few drops. The faith that possessed my soul at her quiet assertion, "It will do you good!" would have defied the malignant operation of prussic acid. I hardly felt the tingle of the ammonia on tongue and throat; held out my arms to be taken into her lap, and clung to her in the blind persuasion that I was safer there than anywhere else, were this indeed the crack of doom.

"Now," said Mr. Bradley, sitting down in front of us, as we rocked slowly in Uncle Archie's one easy-chair, "let us reason together about this mighty matter. Was it long division, or Uncle Windsor's raw-head-and-bloody-bones talk, or Old Sol's blue goggles that upset you?"

I perpetrated something between a giggle and a gulp.

"I don't exactly know, sir; only"—the tears streaming anew—"the world is *all* spoiled!"

I hid my face on Aunt Maria's shoulder. She laid her cool, smooth cheek to my hot forehead.

"That is a great mistake, dear," she said. "God does not ruin things that belong to Him!"

"He will burn the earth up some day—maybe very soon!" I protested.

"That new heavens and a new earth—ever so much better than these—may take their place."

"Listen, Judith!" Mr. Bradley took my hand. "You believe in the Bible, don't you, no matter how blue in the face the sun may turn?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then, when we read there that the Gospel is to be preached to all nations before the end of the world, is it worth while to be frightened to death at changes in the color of the air? Be reasonable!"

I cannot remember the time when the dread of a nearing Judgment Day was not a part of my daily thinking and expectation. It entered so largely into the sermons of the period, into the prayers, exhortations and hymns of the negroes, that every act and scene of the Divine Tragedy were fixed in my mind. At awakening in the morning I said to myself, "It may come before night;" after my evening prayer, "The last trumpet may sound before it is light." A cloud of unusual form and color had thrown me into a violent fit of shivering, the cause of which I was ashamed to own; a lurid or brassy sunset robbed me of appetite and sleep. Uncle Windsor, deprived of the gloomy delectations of the all-day prayer-meeting, had found partial compensation in sitting on the kitchen steps and crooning in a cracked, wheezy voice:

> "Oh, there will be mou'nin', mou'nin', mou'nin',
> At the jedgment-seat o' Christ!
> Parents an' chillen thar will part,
> Parents an' chillen thar will part,
> Parents an' chillen thar mus' part,
> Mus' part to meet no mo'."

And so on through "brothers an' sisters," "frien's an' neighbors," "pastors an' people"—I am not sure but uncles and nephews. There were at least a dozen

verses, and when he had sung to the end, he straightway began again with "parents an' chillen." The other servants had caught his mood. While Mr. Bradley urged me to be reasonable, Becky, the laundress, scrubbing away at the tubs under the aspen trees back of the smoke-house, upraised, in a voice that made her a power in negro convocations, a wild melody which swept every word to our ears:

"You may bury me in de eas',
You may bury me in de wes',
But I 'll hear dat trumpet soun' in de mornin'.
My ears may change to clay,
An' my tongue be wast' away,
But I 'll answer dat trumpet in de mornin'.
In de mornin', in de mornin', in de mornin' ob de Lord—
Ah, we 'll all be togedder in de mornin'!"

It was not strange that the birds refused to sing that day with these canticles of woe jarring the drooping leaves—a Dutch concert of distressful discord.

I sat up straight on my aunt's lap, my eyes suddenly dried.

"I never thought of *that*. May I tell them all? And where is it?"

Smiling at the success of his *ruse*, he took a Bible from the table and put it into my hand, pointing silently to Matthew xxiv: 14. I took in the verse as by instinct, and darted from the room, bearing the book with me. By dinner-time I had read the comforting prophecy to all my schoolfellows, to the kitchen-cabinet and at the quarters, with the same quality if not degree of eagerness with which I would have borne to each a reprieve on the scaffold.

My auditors received it with varieties of characteristic emotion. The scholars ate their "snacks" with revived relish, and forthwith got out the foot-balls, marbles and "checks"-blanket they had not had spirits to

produce before. Two or three who had preferred remaining in the school-room to read their Bibles, shut them up with alacrity upon raggedly-torn scraps of paper inserted at the passage I had revealed to them, and ran to join the sports.

"Take keer, chile!" said Mam Peggy testily, when I would have forced her to look at the verse. "Mars' Archie done tole us dat de wuk is to be done, Resurrection or no Resurrection! How I gwine to get dinner ef you will poke books under my nose? You 'll drap dat Bible in de pot-liquor, mun'" (short for "if you don't mind"). "An' dar 's sayin's in dar dat 'd make it hotter 'n pepper-tea befo' you could fish de Word o' Life outen it!"

This was ungrateful, but nothing in comparison with Uncle Windsor's grumblings at my interruption of his ditty.

"Go 'long, Miss Judy! Think I ain't been hear *dat* fifty times befo' you was born? Dar 's ways o' gittin' 'roun' mos' hard Scripter ef ennybody wants ter. An' dar 's plenty things wuss dan de worl' burnin' up out an' out. What *I* done say, an' what I say now, no marter what Mars' Archie an' forrard chillen think"—severely sarcastic in the classification—"is jes' dis one bit o' 'flammation"—he raised his quavering tones for the benefit of cook, laundress, butler, scullion and five or six loungers about the kitchen door—"*dat 'ar' sign ain't 'peared for nothin'!* De Almighty don't frow 'way His blue fire dat 'ar' way! Dar 's brimstone an' wrath an' warnin' in sech a broad blaze as dis. I ain't got nary word mo' to say. When de jedgment begins at de House o' Israel, you 'll maybe b'ar ole Windsor's langidge in min'! *All* ole folks ain't fools, for all Mars' Archie's argerin' an' chillen's larnin'!"

The day wore on to a dingy-purple sunsetting behind olive-green hills—a dreary ending. Fairly tired out with agitation, I fell asleep earlier than usual. It was midnight when I awoke and slipped out of bed to see if the moon reflected the changed complexion of the greater luminary. She swam above the walnut boughs in a bath of crystalline ether, and the earth, liberated from the unholy spell of the day, sent up gentle murmurings of drowsy content. Dewy zephyrs wandered among the flowers; there was the sound of a going, like the patter of innumerable tiny feet in the poplar tops; the aspens granted to the breeze coy glimpses of the silver lining of their leaves; mother birds addressed little notes of tender interrogation to their young, and called across intervening rifts in the foliage to their neighbors, probably exchanging congratulations upon the restoration of order and seemliness in their world.

I knelt on the floor, my elbows crossed on the window-sill, and drank in peace as from a living fountain. The placidity of the fair moonlight steeped me, body and spirit. The white beams were a personal boon. I recalled Aunt Maria's saying—"God does not ruin things that belong to Him"—in looking up at the kindly stars. I think I speak truly in declaring that I had never before, since my unconscious infancy, gazed upon the mighty vault of the nocturnal heavens without a thrill of awesome fear. The stillness and expanse of the star-sown depths excited thoughts of my chief dread—the day when time should be no more. Aunt Maria, from the wealth of her hymnology, had taught me that these sparkling worlds are

> "Forever singing, as they shine,
> The hand that made us is divine!"

I had read for myself, and remembered more vividly,

another hymn, the majestic measures of Scott's translation,—

> "When quivering, like a parchéd scroll,
> The flaming heavens together roll,"—

and experienced delicious, agonizing shivers along spinal column and scalp in singing it (to the tune of Old Hundred) in the out-door "preachings" I held with the negro children on Sunday afternoons. I had a realistic picture in my imagination of the Hand that should roll up the sky—as I had seen Uncle Archie handle writing-paper—then kindle the scroll in the fairy breath of divine wrath, and apply to the doomed earth.

The dear earth that was not to be destroyed yet—perhaps not until I was quite an old woman, and somewhat weary of mundane things. The progress of missions was slow. I am afraid I said "delightfully slow." I knew the Missionary Hymn by heart, of course; but as I pondered, I concluded it might be well to exempt mentally one little South Sea island—an unimportant Zoar—from the "spread from pole to pole," a saving clause that might postpone indefinitely the coming of the "morning," sung by Becky, and the "mourning" Uncle Windsor anticipated with ghoulish delight.

When I grew sleepy, and cramped with kneeling, I crept back to my trundle-bed, pausing at Aunt Maria's pillow to look at the sweet pale face, and to think how dearly, *dearly* I loved her, and how good she was!

Mammy awoke me with the information that I had just time to dress for prayers. I raised my head in instant recollection of yesterday's alarm. Aunt Maria had gone down-stairs, the windows were all open, and through those that faced the east two parallelograms of livid green were cast into the chamber, one upon the floor, the other across Aunt Maria's white bed.

We had three blue-green days, a fourth more faintly tinged; on the fifth the sun arose brilliantly clear and scorching hot. The colorless glare was accepted by all as a gracious gift from Heaven. At prayers Uncle Archie returned thanks, in terms well-chosen and succinct, for the "blessings of the light, and the sure promise that, while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."

At sunset on the third day, after, as we phrased it, "everything had come right again," Mr. Bradley read to us on the back porch a paper descriptive of the phenomenon he had prepared for a Northern journal. It was truthful and graphic.

"Nobody could have done it better," decided Aunt Betsey, nodding satisfiedly; "and it will be even more interesting in print. There is a something in a printed page that manuscript never has—a sort of smoothing out and setting straight that is like magic."

Uncle Archie stood facing the front hall and door, and now started forward with a hospitable smile and extended hand. A martial tread rang on the floor and a visitor appeared among us. A tall man of sixty or thereabouts, with grizzled hair and whiskers, a long face, squared in the lower jaw, deep-set, piercing eyes, a large mouth and florid color. In walking he stooped very slightly. He stood erect, a commanding figure. He wore high-top boots, white pantaloons, buff vest, and a scarlet frock-coat of military cut, fastened at the waist by two buttons, flaring open above to show a padded chest and ruffled shirt-front. In the left hand he held a planter's straw hat and riding-whip. The right he offered to my grandmother, bending low above the soft, fair fingers placed within it.

"I hope I have the happiness of seeing you quite

well, my dear madame! Mrs. Waddell, I am the humblest of your servants! Miss Maria, I am rejoiced to see that the changing skies have not dimmed your smiles!"

"Miss Dabney," said Grandma, whose courtesy was ever opportune, never officious, "allow me to present our neighbor, Captain Macon."

The guest laid his hand on his heart in a bow that, even then, when men knew how to make obeisance to gentlewomen, was remarkable for grace and expression.

"My dear young lady, I am the friend of your father. I can say nothing more to a daughter."

The girl had arisen as her name was spoken, and now swept him a deep courtesy, her color rising beautifully, her eyes glowing softly.

"I am very happy to meet one of whom my father speaks so often and affectionately."

So engaging was her modest readiness of reply, her deferential demeanor touched with cordiality that was what flavor and perfume are to the downy ripeness of the peach, that I glanced involuntarily at Uncle Archie for sympathy in my admiration. His face was turned from me, but I saw Mr. Bradley's sudden, slight smile —his look at the young lady. This was the sort of thing that would please him, I thought. He was himself apt in repartee, alert with civility.

Captain Macon drew a chair to the side of his friend's daughter, questioned her as to her father's health and spirits, and hoped, in due stateliness of phrase, that she would continue the blessing of her presence to our neighborhood until Major Dabney should come in person to recall her.

"We were brothers in arms and in heart throughout the War of 1812; but we were comrades in our boyhood—playfellows at school and chums at William and

Mary College. I regret extremely that the absence of my daughters at the White Sulphur Springs has deprived them of the pleasure of your acquaintance and me of the honor of welcoming you where your father has always been a dear and honored guest—in my own house at Hunter's Rest. My sons, I am glad to know, have had the privilege of paying their respects to you. That I have not done so ere this has been my grievous misfortune. A multiplication of engagements and hindrances has conspired to deprive me of a coveted pleasure."

"At our age, Captain Macon, we may surely expect indulgence of social shortcomings at the hands of young people," remarked Grandma.

"It is not, madame, that I question Miss Dabney's tenderness of compassion or her generosity. I am regretting my own loss. The more"—another bow—"since meeting her."

He adroitly passed from this complimentary strain to the solar eccentricities we had lately observed—"opined that scientific investigations would shortly analyze and elucidate the causes thereof, demonstrating these to have been natural and in no wise extraordinary."

"You do not regard them as supernatural portents, then?" smiled Aunt Betsey. "Uncle Windsor and his disciples class them with the comet that hung over Jerusalem and the eclipse of the sun last February, and interpret them as signs and warnings."

The Captain switched his left foot smartly with his riding-whip; his jaws grew squarer.

"There is no more monstrous obstacle to human progress and human happiness than the imbecility of superstition," he said, oracularly. "Notably the superstition of ignorance. The *dies iræ* of our land—if Divine Providence"—a reverent inclination of the head

—"hath appointed such unto us—is foretold in three words, to wit, 'the uneducated masses.' The only intellectual stimulus of these is vulgar curiosity, which begets a love for the vivid and startling. This appetite will have food. Rather than hunger it will pursue and slay its own game. Once thus supplied, appetite becomes passion, such lust for prey as worked the guillotine by a million-fiend blood power in the French Revolution. This is the key to most of the wrongfully denominated 'struggles for freedom.' If

'Who rules freemen should himself be free'

be true, it is also patent to every candid apprehension that only the liberal, intelligent mind can so far recognize and value the blessings of liberty as to peril life to acquire it."

"You would then consider most popular rebellions as a kind of 'Follow-your-leader' game?" said Uncle Archie.

"Nothing more, sir! nothing more! when the uprising is of ignorant, mindless underlings. This is the basis of my abhorrence of the Democratic party. Its motto of '*Vox populi, imperium in imperio*' is as false as the faith of its leaders. I have asserted upon the hustings, in the Legislature, in private and in public assemblies, that any sane, rational being would rather be governed by an educated oligarchy than an illiterate democracy. Else, liberty were license, anarchy, ruin. Law, order and safety lie in the rule of the fit and free. Nine-tenths—I might say nineteen-twentieths—of the lives lost in what history dignifies as 'uprisings of the people' are thrown away in ignorant frenzy. The very 'rights' for which the besotted wretches fought would have been such expensive playthings in their keeping as would be this watch of mine to a baby."

"The baby will grow in knowledge, stature and skill," suggested Mr. Bradley, respectfully.

"True, sir! true! But that is not a valid reason why you should let him batter upon the rocks a treasure that cost more than his entire race ever owned! When he is a man grown, or a tolerably intelligent and worthy lad, he shall have the watch from me as a gift and a 'God bless you!' to boot. If he try to steal it or take it by force before then I shall flog him into a sense of honesty and justice.—But this is a political tirade! I crave pardon of the ladies."

He arose with a bow all around—a marvelous combination of homage, apology and farewell.

"Archibald, my good fellow, may I ask for the pleasure of your company as far as the gate? I want to confer with you on a little matter of business."

"You are not going before supper!" remonstrated Grandma. "This is hardly neighborly."

"My dear Mrs. Read, do not make the inevitable the insupportable by adding to hardship the weight of your displeasure. Do me the bare justice to believe that I would not—could not—decline your invitation were not conscience, duty and honor ranged on the other side. With your permission I shall compensate—myself—for the present sacrifice by another and longer call at an early day."

He brushed the floor with the broad brim of his straw hat, and walked bareheaded until out of the house and front porch. Miss Virginia craned her slender neck to watch the soldierly figure down the paved walk leading to the gate and the rack where his horse was tied.

"I comprehend why he called his son Philip Sidney," she said, with a pretty catch in her breath. "But Philip Sidney will never be half so fine a man as his father. He is magnificent, in spite of that ridiculous red coat. Why does he wear it?"

Grandma laughed.

"It is one of his harmless whims, my dear. Quite innocent and quite unaccountable. He does not come of a tory family, nor was he ever very fond of fox-hunting."

"I rather like it," said Aunt Betsey, "It goes so well with his manners and talk. All are somewhat florid."

"They make a harmonious chord," was Mr. Bradley's comment. "All three are essentially Maconian, and none of them would sit well on any other man I ever saw. He is like a red-lettered edition of Sir Charles Grandison."

Grandma laughed again—the low merriment that had never lost its youthful ripple. Aunt Maria echoed it, and Aunt Betsey blushed more redly than the monthly roses over the porch steps.

"It is time to see about supper," she said, hastily, stooping to take up her key basket.

Mr. Bradley gazed bewilderedly after her as she vanished into the house.

"May I be enlightened?" he asked, pathetically.

"You used the key to the puzzle, although unintentionally," rejoined Aunt Maria, still intensely amused. "A few months before Aunt Betsey's marriage, Captain Macon, then a gay widower, offered himself to her by letter. This declaration he slipped into the fourth volume of Sir Charles Grandison, and put the book back in the bookcase. On taking his leave of Aunt Betsey that day, he asked her to 'read carefully a certain marked passage on the forty-third page of the fourth volume of that incomparable work, and favor him with a written or verbal commentary upon the same.'

"She promised to do this, and forgot it entirely. In the letter he had said that he would consider silence as

rejection of his suit, and never trouble her again, but remain forever her true friend and well-wisher. Ten years afterward the gallant Captain, having meanwhile solaced his wounded heart by a handsome second wife—my sister Mary, Judith's mother, read Sir Charles Grandison through, and happened upon the sealed love-letter. The suitor never knew how long it remained unread. Our good aunt has been teased by those who know and enjoy the joke until she has become somewhat sensitive on the subject."

"A real romance in everyday life!" cried Miss Virginia, enchanted. "I was never so close to one before, unless I brushed by it in the dark without knowing it."

While the light chit-chat of the merry group went forward, I strolled around to the front of the house to pick fresh sweetbrier buds for my favorite's breast-knot. The tallest branches of the giant walnut tree were washed with gold such as capped the hill-brows. Vale and plain were in amethyst shadow, warm and transparent. The two figures just outside the wicket-gate of the yard were defined darkly against the pale stubble of a wheat-field beyond the red-clay road. Captain Macon had one hand on the pommel, the bridle gathered up in it, yet did not mount. Their heads were close together; they seemed to whisper their earnest sayings. Twice the Captain brandished his whip so sharply that I heard the whizzing slash in the air which made his horse plunge. At length he swung himself into the saddle, yet leaned down for one long sentence in the other's ear. As the horse bounded away at the spur-prick, I ran down the walk to Uncle Archie. He had not stirred from the spot where he had stood so long, even to gaze after the departing rider, nor did he turn at my approach. As I seized the hand hanging by his side, it had the dead limpness of a glove. Look-

ing up confidently into the face that had always a smile for me, I beheld it dark and dreadful, wrung with pain, and set in anger I could fear but not fathom.

CHAPTER VI.

Aunt Maria went up to our room with me that night as she often did. She was grave and gentle in look and speech. Uncle Archie was troubled about "business," she stated, and did not feel like talking. Grandma had a headache. I must remember in my prayers all who were in distress of any kind, then go to sleep like a dear, good child. She laid a long kiss on my lips when I was in bed. I could have been sure there were tears in her sweet eyes, but durst ask no questions. Family discipline of the mildest type then in practice taught children at least when *not* to speak.

Next morning, after breakfast, Mammy summoned me to "the chamber." Grandma had not appeared at the breakfast-table. She was dressed as usual, but lay back in the great chair she seldom used when in tolerable health, and looked wan and sad. After kissing me, she pointed to her footstool as my seat, and as Mammy was going out called her back.

"Stay here, 'Ritta! I have nothing to say to the child that you may not hear."

The maid obeyed without speaking, and took her stand behind her mistress' chair, one hand on the high back, her eyes downcast, her visage still and melancholy.

Then and thus my grandmother told me the story Captain Macon had ridden over to communicate the preceding day, but which he adjudged fit for men's ears only—the account of what has the bad notoriety of

being the one partially-successful insurrection of the Southern slaves against their masters, among the very few that were definitely planned, the many suggested by mischief-makers not of their race and dreamed of by embryo demagogues of their own color.

Nat Turner, the petted slave of a planter in Southampton County, in southeastern Virginia, had imbibed at an early age the idea that he was divinely appointed to some exalted mission. His silly mother, hearing her four-year-old boy narrate a trifling incident to a playmate, cried out in rapt surprise that it had happened before he was born, and he must be a prophet. His master took much and injudicious notice of the pert urchin, as he grew older, taught him to read and lent him books and newspapers. The lazy protégé, lounging on porches, hanging about political barbecues and waiting behind his master's chair at gentlemen's dinner-parties when wine and argument flowed freely, heard a rare medley of politics and religion, French infidelity and Calvinistic decrees. The fermentation of these elements disordered a brain never too well balanced, fired a train laid by vanity and ambition. He affected to receive revelations from Heaven, prayed long and loud and fasted ostentatiously, and soon became the soothsayer of the region. He muttered excitedly over his work and in solitude, and was reputed to be in familiar communication with unseen spirits. He predicted deaths, accidents, signs in the clouds and prodigies upon the earth. He had mysterious birth-marks on his chest, and captured and exhibited beetles stamped with cabalistic figures, turtles marked with his initials and crossed swords, and locusts with a big "W" wrought in the gossamer of their wings. All these tokens of the Divine purpose pointed to WAR as necessary and imminent.

"On the 12th of May, 1828," he said in his confession, "I heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first—and by signs in the heavens that it would be made known to me when I should commence the great work, and until the first sign appeared I should conceal it from the knowledge of men."

Convinced according to his showing that the predicted war was to be one of races that should lower the first to the present level of the last, and elevate the last to the throne of the first, the yoke-bearer and leader zealously prepared the imaginations of his disciples for some mighty happening, the exact nature of which he might not as yet reveal. He denied himself everything except the meanest food, redoubled his prayers and voluntary mortifications of the flesh, moving among his fellows as one to whom Christ the Lord had relegated the work of final redemption of His saints and vengeance upon their enemies. He preached openly in the sight and hearing of the whites that he had received consecration directly from the Spirit, that he was Elijah, the harbinger of the Second Advent, the herald of the Year of Jubilee; John the Baptist risen from the dead, and crying in the wilderness of Southampton, "Repent! for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

He, for one, had no personal wrongs to avenge. Like the famous "Uncle Jack" of Amelia County, of whom Dr. Rice records, "He is, in many respects, the most remarkable man I ever knew," Nat Turner was regarded with prideful respect by the gentlemen of the neighborhood. His conventicles were tolerated by easy-

going Episcopalians who readily conceded that their ancient and honorable service was not attractive to the lower orders, and encouraged by sects that received, at each sacramental feast, accessions to their church-rolls in "Turner's converts."

"My master was very kind to me and placed the greatest confidence in me," is his testimony. "In fact I had *no cause* to complain of his treatment to me."

This is a very temperate statement of the truth that he was a slave in little besides the name, working just when and where he pleased, and, especially in the long winter evenings, roaming from one plantation to another on what he and his lax and kindly employer regarded as his professional business—home-missionary labors. It may be assumed positively that he who was eventually to claim his master's property as his right, and his master's life as the forfeit paid by the tyrant to the oppressed, never, in the course of his existence of thirty-one years, half earned a decent livelihood. If he had been dependent upon his own exertions he must have starved in a climate where light labor brings in plentiful returns of harvest, and wild fruit is abundant.

In February, 1831, the promised sign appeared—an eclipse of the sun—and to return to his own words, "the seal was removed from my lips.

"It was intended by us to have begun the work of death on the 4th of July last. Many were the plans formed and rejected by us, and it affected my mind to such a degree that I fell sick, and the time passed without our coming to any determination how to commence—still forming new schemes and rejecting them, when the sign appeared again which determined me to wait no longer."

The second heavenly sign was what a local historian

denominates "the unnatural and extraordinary appearance of the sun at that particular period."

Turner lost not an hour in availing himself of the wildly-excited fancies of his satellites. Seven ringleaders met in the woods at three o'clock on Sunday afternoon, August 21, to hold a solemn feast preparatory to the bloody sacrifice in the name of Freedom. To this dinner, "Hark," Nat reports, "brought a pig, and Henry brandy." The seventh man had not been present at previous conferences, and was challenged by the prophet in this manner:

"I saluted them on coming up, and asked Will how he came there.

"He answered that his life was worth no more than others, and his liberty as dear to him.

"I asked him if he thought to obtain it.

"He said he would or lose his life.

"This was enough to put him in full confidence."

The bold realism of the confession is the more revolting that the arch-conspirator's overweening conceit crops out in every paragraph, and the tragical details are given with a passionless triteness that shows by contrast Guiteau's "poor soul!" when alluding to the widow of his victim, as the breathings of tenderest humanity.

"It was quickly agreed that we should commence at home" (*i. e.*, the house of Nat's master, Mr. Joseph Travis) "on that night, and until we had armed and equipped ourselves and gathered sufficient force, neither age nor sex was to be spared (which was invariably adhered to). We remained at the feast until about two hours in the night, when we went to the house and found Austin. They all went to the cider-press and drank except myself. On returning to the house, Hark went to the door with an axe, for the purpose of break-

ing it open, as we knew we were strong enough to murder the family if they were awakened by the noise; but reflecting that it might create an alarm in the neighborhood, we determined to enter the house secretly and murder them while sleeping. Hark got a ladder and set it against the chimney, on which I ascended and hoisted a window, entered and came down stairs, unbarred the door and removed the guns from their places. It was then observed that I must spill the first blood; on which, being armed with a hatchet and accompanied by Will, I entered my master's chamber. It being dark, I could not give a death-blow. The hatchet glanced from his head; he sprang from the bed and called his wife. It was his last word. Will laid him dead with a blow of the axe, and Mrs. Travis shared the same fate as she lay in bed.

"The murder of this family, five in number, was the work of a moment. Not one of them awoke. There was a little infant in a cradle that was forgotten until we had left the house and gone some distance, when Henry and Will returned and killed it."

Their numbers were augmented at each house they visited on the same bloody errand, until they were an armed and mounted gang of between fifty and sixty men. Before the marauders lay the peaceful homes of those who had known and liked and trusted them. Some of the sleeping men and women had partaken of the symbols of the slain body and shed blood of their common Lord and Master from the same pastor's hand year after year. Fellow-Christians, friends, foster-brothers and sisters, the baby at the breast and the bed-ridden grandmother, whose purblind eyes could not discern the face of him who cut her throat—all were stricken down without word and without mercy. At one house breakfast was just over, and a young girl,

leading a pretty boy by the hand, stepped off the porch and tripped down the path to meet Nat Turner at the gate. He had ridden on to reconnoitre, leaving the gang concealed in a corn-field hard by. The young lady knew and greeted him cordially. The child cried out: "Uncle Nat! please give me a ride on your horse?" and held up his arms to be lifted into the saddle.

"Good morning, Miss Kitty," said Nat, alighting. "Is your brother at home?"

"Yes, but he is sick in bed. Will you go up and see him?"

Turner owned, somewhat shamefacedly, in prison that, as she smiled up at him and the boy clasped his leg, his heart failed him for a cowardly second. But he was set apart by the Spirit to the work. He dealt a blow for Freedom when he shot the girl through the heart and cleft the child's head with a broad-axe. His followers rushed forward pell-mell to dispatch the sick man, his mother and three beautiful sisters.

The carnival of blood reigned until the afternoon of Monday. Then, leaving behind a track bestrewed with fifty-five corpses, lying where they had fallen and with none to bury them, the band of liberators, collected by their chief into a caricature of a company of cavalry, and "carried," he said, with modest satisfaction, "through all the maneuvers I was master of," was drawn up in the open road and harangued from the words, "Beginning at Jerusalem." This was the name of the shire-town—"the Court House"—of Southampton County, a mere hamlet of about twenty dwellings clustering about the court-house, clerk's office, jail, a church and two or three stores, in one of which was the post-office. This Turner proposed to make his head-quarters and the pivot of the rebellion. The white residents were first

to be massacred, and it is said that he read as his warrant for the deed the twenty-second chapter of Ezekiel, the sequel of this strange service on which he had not scrupled to ask the Divine blessing. His auditors, drunken with brandy, cider and whisky from the rifled cellars of their butchered masters and lusting for farther carnage, hearkened with gloating senses to the fearful judgments pronounced against the princes who had destroyed souls for dishonest gain, the prophets who daubed with untempered mortar, saying, "Thus saith the Lord God," when the Lord hath not spoken; the people of the land who used oppression and exercised robbery and vexed the poor and needy.

All these, so they now heard from the lips of their Moses, were to be gathered "into the midst of Jerusalem, as they gather silver and brass and iron and lead and tin into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it to melt it." Not one doubted that the shabby little South Country village was in the mind of the Hebrew prophet when he wrote of the capital of "the land that is not cleansed."

When Turner returned the Bible to his pocket—the well-worn volume which he boasted in his condemned cell he spent his Sunday evenings in reading until he could repeat many chapters from memory—his followers raised a savage yell, and spurred down the road toward Jerusalem. The gallop became a run, the run a helter-skelter race, kept up in the dusty highway for four miles. It was a hurly-burly of devils—screeching, bellowing, psalm-singing as they dashed along, brandishing blood-stained scythes, pikes and axes, and now and then firing off a gun or pistol in their murderous glee. The stentorian voice of Turner, trained in prayer-meetings and exhortings, arose at intervals above the hubbub in shouted orders heeded by none. At a bend in the road

the intoxicated crew came abruptly in sight of a squad of white horsemen, ten in number, drawn up across the way.

"Halt and fire!" vociferated Turner to his company.

Before they could raise their guns a volley of musketry blazed along the line of their opponents. One negro fell dead, several others were wounded. A second discharge followed in rapid succession, Turner and his men firing a few random and harmless shots. Before the whites could reload, the rebels turned their horses' heads as one man, and fled at full speed.

"On my way back," their leader relates, "I called at Mr. Thomas', Mrs. Spencer's, and several other places. The white families having fled, we found no more victims to gratify our thirst for blood. We stopped at Major Ridley's quarter for the night, and being joined by four of his men, with the recruits made since my defeat, we mustered now about forty strong."

Without understanding why he does so, he mentions the "thirst for blood" of the rampant brute-part he had aroused in the hitherto indolent and docile black, as naturally as he tells how, after the gross and prolonged feast of Sunday night, "all went to the cider-press and drank."

A false alarm was raised during the night by the sentinels he had posted. They came running into the camp with the news that they were to be attacked. Turner had lain down to sleep, but was "quickly roused by a great racket." He ordered a reconnoissance, and the return of these scouts being mistaken for hostile horsemen, the rout was complete. All but twenty dispersed in various directions, in spite of Turner's frantic endeavor to rally them. He "called" during Tuesday forenoon upon other families in the neighborhood, but

was fired upon from upper windows in two or three instances and retreated, leaving several of his followers wounded.

"I do not know what became of them," he says, "as I never saw them afterward. Pursuing our way back and coming in sight of Captain Harris', where we had been the day before, we discovered a party of white men at the house, on which all deserted me but two—Jacob and Nat."

These he sent out from the rendezvous in the woods, where the Sabbath feast had been held, "with orders to rally all they could." They were the bearers of imperative requisitions upon the six other ringleaders. Turner remained alone in the depths of the forest until Wednesday afternoon, when he caught sight of "white men riding round the place as though they were looking for some one," and concluded that his emissaries had been captured, and, as he generously puts it, "compelled to betray" him.

For six weeks he skulked in woods and field, burrowing like a ground-hog under piles of rails and fallen timber, in holes dug with the sword he had waved in the "Forward to Jerusalem" charge, and subsisting on green corn, potatoes and meat stolen from the deserted Travis place. The only human beings to whom he spoke during this time were two negroes who were out hunting one night with a dog, and passed his cave.

I copy his account of the incident:

"I had just gone out to walk about and the dog discovered me and barked. On which, thinking myself discovered, I spoke to them to beg concealment. *On making myself known they fled from me. Knowing then they would betray me*, I immediately left my hiding-place."

There are pathos and significance in the words I have

italicised that almost move us to compassion for the humiliated seer and liberator, and prove that he knew the material he had to deal with better than an alien to the race could have understood it.

A fortnight afterward Mr. Phipps, one of the armed patrol that never let the fugitive's scent get cold, caught a glimpse of something stirring under the bushy top of a prostrate oak, and riding closer, saw that it was human and black. Without a moment's hesitation he brought his cocked gun to his shoulder, covering the crouching creature. A hoarse voice begged him to hold his fire, and a ragged, earth-grimed thing, emaciated by fasting and trembling with the malarial ague of the low countries, crept into the sunshine. Even in this extremest degradation the defeated leader clung to the last shred of official pomp. The deputy of Him who "had borne the yoke for the sins of men," went through, as he chronicles, the form of "surrendering" his sword to the captor, as to another and a victorious general.

There was no plea of insanity urged at his trial. Nor was there in other and non-slaveholding states any expression of sympathy with the aims and acts, or pity for the fate of one who, forsaken at the first show of opposition by the adherents who had sworn within two days to sell life for liberty, yet believed up to the gallows' foot that "God set him about this righteous work."

One item in the list of the killed on that Sunday night after the "feast of consecration," is:

"*Mrs. Levi Walker and ten children.*"

It was hard to convince Christians in the first third of the nineteenth century that "Divine necessity" takes such form as this.

The outline of this frightful tale, up to the dispersion

"THE DEFEATED LEADER CLUNG TO THE LAST SHRED OF OFFICIAL POMP."—p. 96.

of the rebels on Tuesday noon, was what my grandmother imparted to me as cautiously as was consistent with my right comprehension of the situation in which we, with other Virginian families, were placed by the catastrophe. Swift messengers had borne the news to Richmond, and others been dispatched by the state authorities at the capital in every direction to warn the white population of the danger working under their feet. Military companies from armory and municipality set off without the delay of an hour for the afflicted county seventy miles away. The Richmond Blues, the gallant volunteers that had marched forth in the tempest of rain and fire from heaven to oppose Gabriel's horde, buckled on sword-belts, shouldered muskets, and joined in this bloodier expedition. Infuriated at the fiendish atrocity of the wholesale butchery reported to them; racked beyond the power of control at the horrible sights that met them in their passage through a district where there were not enough living inhabitants to put decently underground the piles of dead blackening in the August heat—they were hardly restrained by discipline from entering upon a retaliative slaughter of the Southampton negroes. They ransacked quarters and barns and woods with the zeal of bloodhounds for evidences of complicity in the horrid work; shot without warrant or remorse at dusky figures stealing through the underbrush, hiding behind trees and lurking in gullies, as the militia and regular soldiery rode by in their fierce patrol of the neighborhood.

These and other particulars were unknown to us when I listened to Grandma's brief synopsis of Captain Macon's news. He, as the head of the impromptu police put on duty in our county, was in possession of little beyond the leading facts of the case. The end of the thread trailed away into portentous darkness. The

extent of the conspiracy; what other and direful developments were in reserve for us; what were the probabilities of the reappearance of the chief of the murderers in another section with a new host at his call—these were the harrowing uncertainties that begloomed the views of the most sanguine. Of this suspenseful period—the six weeks in which the whole colored population of Virginia lay under suspicion of harboring the escaped ringleader, and rumors were rife and rapid of his machinations and whereabouts—John Randolph's declaration was true, "When the fire-bell in Richmond rings at night, there is never a mother within hearing of it who does not clasp her baby more tightly to her breast."

Grandma did not affect to conceal from me that our lives might be in jeopardy every hour. She did speak calmly of the duty of courage and resolution, tenderly of the one certainty that remained to us, that a God of love and infinite compassion was above all, and we could not suffer hurt without his knowledge and consent.

And this with Mammy standing behind her mistress' chair, one swarthy hand—sinewy yet and strong enough to interrupt for all time the breath in the white throat above the lawn ruffles of the widow's dress—almost touching her shoulder as the tale went on!

"'Ritta," said Grandma, when there was no more to tell, "will you pour out my drops for me?"

The medicine was in a closet. It was powerful, and must be used carefully. There were other and deadlier poisons on the same shelf that might be substituted for it. Grandma did not turn her head to watch the woman as she obeyed the order, drank the potion prepared, and gave back the glass with the usual, "Thank you, 'Ritta," that repaid every such service.

"Mammy," said I, breathless and dizzy with a sudden thought, "how did you know anything about Nat Turner's plans a week ago last Thursday night—the night I had the nightmare—the night you told me about your grandfather and your father?"

"A week ago last Thursday," repeated Grandma, slowly. "Why, my child, nothing of all this had happened then?"

"It was the day Aunt Betsey was talking about Gabriel's insurrection on the porch," I continued, too excited to recollect *how* I had heard her.

"I remember. We were saying last night how strange it was that our thoughts should have taken that turn. It would seem sometimes as if the air caught and carried feelings and opinions."

She said it musingly and tranquilly; then, for the first time since I had sprung the question upon her, looked at her maid.

"Did you know or suspect anything of this before it came to pass?" without change of tone or expression.

Mammy set aside the glass, folded her hands in the submissive way common with her, and rested her eyes full upon her mistress' face.

"It was in the air, as you say, ma'am. 'Twasn't a story, but a sayin' that brought on the talk. It came up in the kitchen from the chapter Mars' Archie read at pra'rs. Michael he arsked his mammy what was the meanin' o' 'insurrection.' He say as how he been hear Miss Betsey talkin' 'bout one on the po'ch, an' 'bout Gabriel an' the creek risin'. He was in the dinin'-room breshin' out the flies. Rose she was all for shettin' him up, but Uncle Win'sor—you know how heady he is, ma'am—would have his say 'bout them ole times, an' Barrateer he tole what some men had said in his shop one day, two or three weeks ago, 'bout slavery not being

the 'pintment of the Lord, though He does 'low it, an' how liberty was proclaim' to all de 'habitants o' the lan', an' why not black as well as white? That was the peth o' the talk, ma'am, arfter we had sont the chillen to bed; but it sot me to argyin' an' thinkin', an' when I come into the house to fix yo' room for the night, I couldn't fetch up all at onct. I dar' say, what with turnin' it over in my min' an' frettin' over other people's foolishness, I may have spoken imprudent to Miss Judith."

"Who were the men who talked in the blacksmith's shop?"

"Barrateer didn't know 'em, ma'am. The tire of their carryall wheel had come off. But he 'd a notion, from their common looks and keerless ways, that they were free niggers."

"Very likely," thoughtfully. "I must speak to your Master Archie about them. It may be of some importance. Such careless, idle talk does much harm. 'Ritta" —the black eyes, usually so mild, were piercingly bright —"I have told Miss Judith what I have learned about this terrible affair. Have I had all that you know—or suspect?"

French sparkle met Huguenot glow as the two women faced each other. The kingly blood in the serf triumphed over the habit of subjection learned in two generations.

"My mistis has arsked me for the truth. I has been serve' her fur thirty odd year, an' she ain't never foun' a lie in my mouth. This plantation an' this fam'ly is all the home an' frien's I got in this worl'. My husban' he is in a country whar even the bondage o' sin is unknown. My only chile, my son, a man growed, lives here with me in peace an' honor. I arsk nothin' better o' the Lord than that He 'll let me die here in my nes', an' fur the same han's to close my eyes that shet

down my mother's eyelids. But *ef* my mistis wish to hear what other folks—younger folks—think, ef they darsn't say it out, it 's somethin' like this: '*Ef* freedom ain't a good thing, why does the Word o' the Lord make so much of it?' The bondwoman ain't the blessid one *thar*. Jerusalem which is above is free. The 'fas' which the Lord has chosen is to loose the ban's o' wickedness.' But that ain't all! 'To ondo the heavy burdens.' An' it don't stop thar! '*To let the oppress' go free, an' to break every yoke!*' Now, these shoulders o' mine ain't cuarr'ed no heavier burdens 'n I could stan' up under. But my mother's did! I ain't oppress'. No yoke ain't fasten' on my neck. But my gran'father—a king in his own lan'—never got up from crawlin' on his han's an' knees under his 'n tell he stood up straight an' white, a saved soul, befo' Him who made him free with an everlastin' freedom. It 's somethin' wuth talkin' 'bout fur a man to be his own marster. It 's better wuth havin' fur him to be sure that he ken live joyful all the days o' his life with his wife an' chillen. *You know what happens sometime, Mistis!* Never with your servants, thank the Lord! Thar ain't been a Read servant sole sence I ken remember, nor in my mother's lifetime, I been hear her say. But 'tain't so in other places an' with other folks!"

"I would free you all to-morrow, 'Ritta, if I could. The Master whom we both serve is my witness that I speak the truth."

"Don' I know that, ma'am? Don' all this place know it, down to the younges' chile that ken tell its right han' from the lef'? An' don' we all onderstan' that ef you did thar wouldn't be no res' fur the sole o' our foot on Virginny sile? that we mus' pack up babies an' bundles an' tramp off to earn our livin' 'mong strangers an' furriners whar we 'll be dispisable on 'count

o' our color? We ain't all of us born fools yit, nor ongrateful to them that have done the bes' they could by us. You been arsk me what I know an' what I suspec'. I know there ain't a colored person that ever b'longed to you or yours that wouldn't stan' between you an' Nat Turner's meat-axe any time o' day or night. Befo' a h'ar o' yo' head falls he 's got to kill every man an' woman o' his own color on this plantation. We all heerd this story of the crazy wickedness goin' on in Southampton las' night. We all onderstood this mornin' at pra'rs what Mars' Archie wanted to talk to the han's about when he tole them to meet him at the quarters when they heerd the horn blow soon arfter breakfas'. He knows by this time how *they* think an' feel.

"I ain't denyin' that ef it was so ez they could be free without bein' transpo'ted into strange countries like so many barn-burners an' horse-stealers, they 'd bless the day that gin' 'em liberty. But they don' see their way clear to the Promise' Lan' over a road fenced in with babies' corpses an' knee-deep in the blood o' innercent women who have done nothin' but try to cuarry the load in the fear o' the Lord that their forefathers laid 'pon 'em. They can't see, bein' Christyuns an' human bein's, ez the Lord calls them to march through no sech Red Sea as *that!*

"That 's all I *know*. I don' suspec' nothin'!"

My grandmother was a woman of singular self-command. She seldom shed tears, almost as seldom lost the dignified repose which gave such exquisite finish to her manner. I was actually terrified when I saw her draw out her handkerchief and press it to her eyes. She arose to her feet and laid her hand—fine bred in every line and tint, the thread of gold that remained of the wedding-ring its only ornament—on the dark fingers interlaced in the energy of her attendant's speech.

"SHE LAID HER HAND ON THE DARK FINGERS OF HER ATTENDANT."—p. 102.

"I believe you—and I trust them! Say to them—my people whom I love, my friends who have served and cared for me and mine these many years—these words from the Book in which we all believe:

"'*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*'

"I do not believe that they will be called upon to defend my life with theirs. But I shall be a rich woman all my days in knowing that they would, if necessary, give me and my children this proof of love."

CHAPTER VII.

THE parlor at Summerfield was wainscotted and paneled from floor to ceiling—I think with oak; certainly with hard wood, firm in grain and solid in style—but painted by some long-ago owner, in unpardonable barbarity of taste, of a reddish brown. The solecism of coating such boards with any kind of pigment was, however, the more readily pardoned in that the hue in the toning-down of years approximated the mellow sombreness the native material would have gathered in the same time. The carpet was of dim reds and softened browns. The furniture—mahogany, massive and stiff—consisted of exactly a dozen chairs, two very hard settees at the sides of the room, two round tables in opposite corners, a candle-stand, the top turned up during the day, and set flat against the wall on the left hand side of the fire to balance the effect of the Bible-stand on the right. Aunt Maria's harmonica was pushed hard into the wall-angle nearest the light-stand, and had a companion-piece in the escritoire on which I

pen this chronicle, shoved as close into the corner beyond the tripod upbearing the Holy Scriptures.

This escritoire, spoken of by the family as "Archie's secretary," was brought from France by my great-uncle, Littleton Read, when he returned from abroad with Francis Bernard as his valet. It is of solid mahogany, inlaid with narrow lines and points of satin-wood. Two deep drawers have brass handles. A folding desk-leaf above them rests, when open, upon perpendicular supports drawn out from the body of the secretary. Back of and above the desk is a section in shape and height resembling the top of an upright piano. Fluted doors, sliding back in grooves, and running around the corners of the upright to disappear entirely and mysteriously from view until a pull at two little brass knobs—the only evidences of their locality left to sight—brings them again to the fore—shut in small drawers and pigeon-holes when the escritoire is not in use.

"A gem," lovers of old furniture call it. To me it is a missal the secret of whose clasp I alone comprehend. When I slide back the curious doors I am—out of the body—in another place and generation than that to which I nominally belong. From the archway of the central recess, where inkstand and pen are kept as of old, my childhood's self looks forth into eyes graver with sorrow and thought than they were then with musings far too mature for my years and experience. In passing, I have a trick of laying my hand lightly on the closed leaf. I find myself sometimes sitting at it when it is unfolded, paper and pen laid out for work—dreaming, is it? or seeing?

For it is *there*, then, be it to soul-sight or to faithful memory, that has not suffered one lineament to be blurred by the dash of the waves we know as years. A

stalwart form seated in front of the baize-covered surface revealed by the open lid; the thick waves of black hair falling low upon the forehead, with the bowing of the head above account-books and letters; a dark, steadfast face, gray eyes too earnest for laughter, but which softened and deepened suddenly when they smiled; a mouth like Aunt Maria's in the loving, winsome half-pout of the lower lip, on which the upper was laid in more resolute lines than in his sister's—careless, indeed, would be the custodian that could lose the portrait for which he sat to such worshipful affection as I bore him. This was my Uncle Archie—a simple, God-fearing gentleman, who believed in the Bible and Confession of Faith; voted the Whig ticket, and paid his debts, one hundred cents in the dollar; acknowledged no social code but that of right, and loved one woman better than aught else on earth, save truth and honor.

The desk was open and the owner in the arm-chair before it on Christmas Eve, which fell that year on Saturday. He usually made up his books after supper on Saturday night, giving audience then to the plantation blacksmith, carpenter, shoemaker and the head-man of the field-gang. These he had directed to-day to bring in their reports immediately after dinner. While they gave and he entered them in a large ledger, I sat in my winter "chimney-place" on a sheepskin, dyed red-brown, stuffed and lined by Mammy's own hands, laid on the floor in the shelter of the Bible-stand. My back was against the wall, my knees drawn up to support a volume taken from the book-case at the farther end of the room. It was but an average planter's library, yet many expensive collections of our bibliomaniacal times are comparatively poor in standard English literature. *The Spectator*, in ten small sheepskin volumes, took up half of one shelf; "Rasselas," "Vattek," "Arcadia,"

Sir Thomas Moore's "Utopia" and "Pilgrim's Progress" filled it out. "Plutarch's Lives," translations of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey," Shakspeare, Milton, Thomson, Pope, Cowper, James Montgomery's poems, the for-ten-years-unread Sir Charles Grandison, Rollins' "Ancient History," Hannah More, Mrs. Rowe, Jeremy and Isaac Taylor, Baxter, "Scott's Commentary," "Hervey's Meditations," "Young's Night Thoughts," "The Lady of the Manor," a series of Episcopal tales in seven volumes, that went near to restoring me to the church of my ancestors; "The Children of the Abbey," "Dunallan," all the Waverley novels, Saurin's and Samuel Davies' Sermons—were some of the works that stocked the capacious case. From my sixth year I browsed at will on such strong and wholesome pasturage. There were few volumes then designed expressly for children, except school "Readers" and "Class-Books." When I was tired skirmishing with words and thoughts too mighty for me, I fell back for recuperation upon the "New York Reader" and Mrs. Barbauld, always beloved, however far I might have outgrown them.

The book I had selected on this particular afternoon was, I recollect, Wirt's "British Spy." My grandfather had left pen-and-ink annotations in the margin, identifying this and that character, designated by asterisks, with well-known public men in Church and State. The leaves parted of themselves at the description of "The Blind Preacher." With very inadequate appreciation of the beauty of the word-painting, and, nevertheless, drawing from it a certain vague enjoyment—a sort of mental cuticular absorption, which is one of the uncovenanted advantages of this mode of education—I had read this chapter until I knew it without book. Dr. Waddell was, as Virginians

rate such ties, a connection of our family. Aunt Betsey had married his second or third cousin, and the subject of Wirt's eulogy had been a guest at Summerfield in the lifetime of my grandfather.

Aunt Betsey liked to relate to theological students how, before there was any established divinity school in Virginia, young men preparing for the ministry were wont to apply to Dr. Waddell for instruction in Hebrew, in which tongue he was proficient. One was a resident for some months in his house, learned enough Hebrew to enable him to pass examination for licensure, and married the tutor's daughter. Another succeeded him, went through his pupilage, and carried off a second daughter. A third did likewise, and a fourth wedded the sole remaining girl of the household. When the fifth aspirant for initiation into the recondite lore of the Pentateuch presented himself, the oft-robbed parent dryly informed him that his "stock of Hebrew idioms was exhausted."

"To this day," the narrator would add, smiling over the rims of her spectacles at her auditor, "in that part of the state, when a young man is in love, they say he is studying Hebrew."

I recalled the pleasing anecdote while my eyes dwelt on the words: "He is not only a very polite scholar, but a man of extensive and profound erudition."

Then my fancy rambled off to other tales of the great and good—some gleaned from the printed page, more harvested from the every-day talk going on about me. The phrase, "representative men," had not then been adopted in the significance it now bears, or I might have divined that my small world was peopled with such—with people who had room to grow and time to form in just accord with the impulses of natural germination and development; in whom belief and principle were

substantial framework, sustaining the same relation to the external life that bole and boughs do to the cumulative foliage of the oak. Character was expressed opinion and faith, as strong and as sound as conscientious research could make them. Each sturdy oak mounted upward and spread outward of and for itself in the wide bounteousness then vouchsafed to individuality. Every man was a study, every woman an entity. This is not sentimental maundering over the fancied "grace of a day that is dead," but a loving tribute to times which, take them all in all, may have been no better than these, yet were fraught with a wholesome vitality, a direct exhibition of original elements now ignored or vitiated, that make the superficial life of today vapid and jejune by comparison. Men's minds then were like their book-cases—furnished with recognized standards and classics of doctrine, studied from preface to "finis," not once, but so many times that, by infiltration, thought, and through thought, action and existence were colored by them.

While I dreamed, dipping occasionally into such pools of "British Spy" literature as looked shallow enough for my wading, the sable subordinates had had their audience and retired. Several small piles of coin ranged on the baize at the master's elbow had gradually vanished. As each man was dismissed he received a Christmas gratuity and a word or two of commendation.

"You have done well this year. I hope you will have a merry holiday and a happy New Year," was the longest expression of approval and good-will, but the recipients took fully and gratefully for granted all that lay back of the laconic phrases.

The only sound that broke in upon the afternoon quiet was the scratching of Uncle Archie's pen and the

muffled roar of the fire up the throat of the chimney. Logs—not sticks—had been piled as far up as the builder's arm could lay them and then be withdrawn from the roof of the fireplace. Tall brass andirons supported the load, a richly-wrought fender of the same brilliant metal hedged it about. The conflagration was well under way. The bark had ceased to crackle—the flames wound smooth swathes about the wood; the hiss and drip of the sap from the cut ends told that the billets were hot to the heart. The pipe-clayed hearth and jambs were rosy in the glare. In the glass doors of the high book-case my end of the room was distinctly reflected, but in small-paned sections, like panel-pictures; the fire in its rush and flare; the mantel ornaments of square white vases filled with holly-berries; between them Grandma's portrait with the rose in her bodice, the frame wreathed with running-cedar; low down and cut short by a drawer, a dissected map of myself, clad in the crimson merino which was my best winter frock. Outside, the heavens were gray with wind-clouds, scurrying in troubled indecision from the north-west. The walnut-tree top rocked and beat backward hands at the blast before which it was forced to bend; the naked rose-branches whipped fitfully across the windows.

I hugged myself in the warm, cushioned covert under the broad wing of the Bible-stand.

"Ah!" I sighed involuntarily, then started guiltily, for I was innocently vain of the reputation of never disturbing grown people by my presence.

Uncle Archie glanced smilingly over his shoulder.

"Tired, Judith?"

"No, sir. I didn't mean to do it. Only—it is Christmas Eve, and everything is so nice and pleasant. I was just enjoying it—that is all!"

"'Christmas in your bones,' as the servants say? I am glad my little girl is happy."

He returned to his work, and I left the pictures in the glass to watch him. His brow was clear, his smile genial. He, too, looked happy, and I believed that I knew why.

Miss Virginia Dabney had left us early in September. She was never quite easy after the news came of the Southampton massacre. Mammy said to me once that it was natural to believe one would be safer in town than country while such rumors were flying about of renewed risings, and Nat Turner was still uncaught. Miss Virginia said she was anxious to rejoin her family, that, come what might, they would all be together. There was some delay and a little difficulty in arranging the manner of her return. The roads were not considered safe for private carriages; we were twenty miles from the tri-weekly stage to Richmond, and in this, which carried four armed militiamen on the top, it was not esteemed proper for a young lady to travel alone. Finally, a guard of honor, consisting of Sidney Macon, our cousin Clem Read, and Mr. Bradley, escorted her and her maid to the nearest stage-house. Mr. Bradley, who had received letters requiring his presence in the city, accompanied her the rest of the way. Everything was quiet now, outwardly. In the Legislature wise men were discussing the bill for the gradual abolition of slavery. It was lost two months later by a single vote, but at this Christmas-tide we were sanguine that it would be carried by a large majority. The political and domestic sky was clear and propitious to the grateful celebration of our thanksgiving week.

Aunt Maria had gone, a fortnight ago, to pay a long-deferred visit to her Richmond friend, conditional upon Miss Virginia's engagement to pass Christmas at Sum-

merfield. The two were expected this evening. It had not been practicable for Uncle Archie to be one of her attendants in September. His post was on the plantation, which he would let no one patrol except himself. He had pledged his word for the good faith and quiet behavior of his servants to the neighborhood police, and could not quit home for a day in the distempered condition of public feeling. Nor would his engagements at this season allow him to spare three days in order to bring his sister and her guest home for Christmas. It was fortunate that Mr. Bradley's school-term closed December 15th, and that his arrangements for the ensuing year made it expedient for him to go again to town before January 1st. He had been absent now four days, having gone down in the Summerfield carriage sent for the young ladies.

I laughed slyly to my discreet self with the wonder whether Uncle Archie suspected how truly I deciphered his face that day—the serene content of his eyes, the half-smile that relaxed the habitual compression of his lips—if he imagined that I did not note his occasional glance at the clouds, or that he looked at his watch a dozen times during the afternoon. His lapses into dreamy inaction had hindered the progress of his task. He held himself inexorably to pen and figures until the fire-lit area about the hearth looked redder and brighter for the darkening shadows hemming it in and pressing it closer. By-and-by the door opened quietly, and my mother, Mrs. Mary Trueheart, entered. She and my father had arrived two days before, with the three children younger than myself. We never failed to pass Christmas in the old homestead.

My grandfather was fair of skin and hair, and his wife used to say that they divided the children equally between them. My mother and her brothers Sterling

and Wythe were Saxon blondes, with blue eyes. Uncle Archie, Aunt Maria and the eldest sister and first-born, who died in childhood, were brunettes, inheriting with their mother's coloring much of her stateliness of carriage and motion. The lady who now appeared through the ruddy dusks nearest the door was small and plump, vivacious in visage and talk, full of fun and feeling. "A handful of sunshine," her husband called her, and she carried her household and maternal responsibilities as lightly as was consistent with a religious valuation of their weight and worth. Her brother looked up brightly at her approach, and she lifted a menacing forefinger.

"My dear boy! have you no mercy on your eyes? Don't you know when blind-man's holiday begins?"

He wiped the pen and put it away; shook the sand-box over the wet lines of the page just written.

"I have just finished. My week's—and my year's work is done!"

He rested his head against her shoulder, as she put her arm behind his neck. Dear and lovely as was the younger sister, she could never be all to him that this, his senior by three years, still was. I caught the sigh of relief or satisfaction—it had no breath of weariness—that escaped him.

"A hard year's work, I know. Has it been a good one?"

"Better than I dared hope for. The best since the management of the estate came into my hands. The crops have turned out finely. You heard me telling Tom about the tobacco last night? Wheat, corn, cotton have done quite as well; the new mill and cotton-gin more than paid for themselves. The stock is in splendid condition. You must ride down to the far pasture with me some day and look at my blooded colts

and the calves. We have a hundred pigs wintered in the pine-woods, and as many sheep in the stable-meadow, with food enough to carry them all well into the spring. Two such seasons would oblige us, if not to pull down our barns, at least to put up more and larger ones. Our expenses should be no heavier next year than this. Wythe enters college, but Sterling has graduated. I am proud of that boy's independence, although I did oppose at first his idea of teaching school while studying law. He is determined to pay his own way henceforward, he says. I do not grudge Bradley his good fortune, but I wish Sterling had such a situation offered him, instead of an old-field school."

He had pulled his sister down to his knee. Her pretty white hand—the family were noted for the beauty of their hands—threaded and tossed his hair while they talked.

"Mr. Bradley is to have a private class in Richmond, isn't he?"

"Of six boys, whom he is to fit for college. The duties will not occupy more than half the day, leaving him plenty of time for his law studies. He is a fine fellow, and deserves the best that can be done for him. We shall miss him sadly, but when Wythe goes there will be no more need of a tutor. And Bradley can do so much better than to stay here, even if there were younger boys to be educated."

"There is something very winning in his manner," answered my mother, and I fancied with a dry edge to her accent. "He impresses me as one who is sure to make his way in the world. But I don't feel that I know him very well. Tom says I have not taken kindly to him because he is a Yankee."

"He is a thorough gentleman—an honorable, high-minded Christian man, whom any Southerner might be

proud to call 'friend.' I have known him more intimately than any other of our tutors. He can be trusted to the world's end, and to death."

"If all I hear be true, you are not the only member of the family that holds that opinion," rejoined my mother. "I have my suspicions."

"Of Aunt Betsey?" demurely. "So have I. But I make it a rule not to interfere in such affairs. Having eyes, I see not; having ears, I hear not, and know only what I am told in so many words. Of one thing I am certain, and that is all I, as Aunt Betsey's guardian, need know. Bradley would never abuse the advantages of his position here, whatever his feelings may be. And it is a serious question, Molly, whether or no a man has a right to try to bind another by an engagement that may drag on for years. My view has always been that he should have the foundations of the house laid, or, at any rate, some notion where and how it is to be built, before he invites a tenderly-reared girl to live in it."

The fair fingers closed saucily on one lock of hair, dealing it a decisive tweak, under which he winced and laughed.

"I must tell you of a talk, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, that I had the other day with Uncle Hamilcar, our carriage-driver, you know. He has just married a woman twenty-five years younger than himself, and this before Aunt Sylvy, his first wife, had been four months in her grave. I scolded him roundly, as was my duty as a woman and a mistress. I told him his conduct was scandalous, an offense to taste and decency, and an insult to Sylvy's memory. He was humble but not contrite, and prepared forthwith to debate the case.

"'I did 'lot 'pon waitin' 'bout a year mistis,' he said, 'to show propa resentmen' to de dear deceasted, you onderstan', marm. But, as I look at de case, my

mistis, it 's jes' 'bout dis way: S'pose you was a-stan'in' on de bank o' Jeemses River, an' you was to see a moughty big snappin'-turkle, what you knowed would make de bes' sort o' stew an' soup, a-floatin' down t'wards you. Well, you don' want dat ar turkle jes' dat minnit. Too soon arter breakfuss, maybe. Maybe you don' want him dat day. You got plenty bacon in de smoke-house. But yo' know in yo' soul dat de time is a-comin' when dat ar turkle will be moughty convenient fur you to have roun' de house. *An'* ef *you* don' cotch him, like 's not somebody else will, an' whar you an' yo' stew an' yo' soup den? Wouldn't it be a heap sensibler in you fur to make sure o' him by gittin' holt o' him quick 's you ken, an' tyin' him to a stake on de bank 'ginst you want him? Dat ar 's de very thing I been gone an' done, my mistis. Ef I hadn't 'a' married Sally, somebody else would 'a' co'rted her while I was a-mo'rnin' for po' Sylvy, an' den—*dar!*'"

Uncle Archie's laugh was as fresh-hearted as a boy's.

"Moral," he said: "Bradley would do well as a prudent provider to make sure of—Aunt Betsey—for fear of trespassers."

My mother shook her head.

"I said never a word about Mr. Bradley. My mind is running upon somebody worth fifty such men as the agreeable pedagogue. Don't frown. I like you for praising your friend, and he may be all you say, yet not your equal by many degrees. Surely, Archie—to come down to practical talk—*you* ought to profit by present prosperity. Even the small percentage of the proceeds of sales, etc., that you consented, five years ago, to accept as your share—you, to whom the estate owes so much, should justify you in thinking of your own happiness. You don't mind my plain speaking? We were boy and girl together, dear!"

"Did I ever 'mind' anything you said? I wanted to talk to you on this very subject. Two years ago I got my head above water. Last year I laid hold of a plank and climbed upon it. This year I have a little raft—not a smart affair, but staunch. I hope, and sometimes believe that it will, in the course of another year, be big enough to float two comfortably. Provided"—archly—"the second passenger is not very heavy."

His sister leaned forward and kissed him in the middle of his forehead, where I knew, from the odd constraint in voice and manner blent with his forced gayety, that the branching vein was throbbing.

"Heavy or light, she will be a very happy woman, brother! She is a dear, warm-hearted child; loving, sweet-tempered and pretty enough to turn even this steady head. I don't deny that I wanted you once to marry somebody else, but I am quite willing to believe that you are a better judge than I of what suits you."

"Will I suit *her?* That is the question that torments me!" broke out the man impetuously.

Up to this instant I had been aware that he framed his speech in the recollection that I was within earshot; that his mention of Aunt Betsey's name, and the figures of plank and raft were designed to bewilder me into loss of the clue to the real personages referred to, should I be listening instead of being absorbed in my book. They all had a notion that when I plunged into printed matter I became forthwith deaf and blind. They always talked before me with a freedom that would have been dangerous had I not been trained neither to interrupt the conversation of my elders by pert questions nor to repeat afterward what had not been addressed to me. But this last ejaculation was in a different key—the minor of pain, doubt, longing, thrilling through strong desire, hope and thankfulness. It tingled along my

nerves like the shock of a voltaic battery, and brought the first misgiving that I had no right to be where I was.

"Her views on this subject may not be the same as mine," he went on, using the plain, practical phrases habitual to him. I doubt if he could have found any others, even for love-making. "She is such a dainty little thing! refined in all her ways, and used to elegances I may never be able to give her, however good may be my will. I seem to myself sometimes to be nothing better than a clodhopper in her presence; sometimes a clod itself. She permits me to be her friend. She talks freely—almost confidentially—with me, as with an older brother. Will she be frightened—or disgusted—when I speak of what I have felt for her ever since she was a school-girl spending her summer vacations here with Maria? Am I too old, too sober, not intellectual enough for her? I turn these and forty other questions over in my mind until I am almost distracted."

"My poor boy! But I could laugh at your harrowing doubts if it were not *you* who are speaking. I know she respects and likes you. Why not, by one bold stroke, find out just how well?"

"I have had no right to speak out while she was our guest. No right to speak at all until I could maintain her comfortably. In what I am disposed to think are my sanest moments I am ready to believe that it would be rank presumption in the best man that ever lived to ask a girl like Virginia Dabney to marry him. For all that, the dearest hope I have in this world is that I may win her as *my wife*"—his voice sinking in a reverent cadence.

The Bible-stand toppled over with a resounding bang, and I scrambled up, very red in the face, very weak in

the knees, and uncertain how to live through the next minute.

"JUDITH!"

My mother's countenance and emphasis revealed a new horror. She had not known until the crash came that I was in the room!

"Indeed, mamma, I came out as soon as I saw he had forgotten. I thought you saw me sitting there! I am *so* sorry! Uncle Archie knew—"

Tears drowned the words.

Uncle Archie picked up stand and Bible and restored them to their places. The momentary cloud was gone from his face when he turned to me. He put his arm about my waist and gathered me up close to him.

"I forgot her entirely," he said to his sister, "although I spoke to her just before you came in. She comes and goes like a shadow, always. She had a right to be here. It was no fault of hers that she heard what we said. And, when I think of it, I don't care much, Sweetbrier. You are a sensible little woman, who knows how to hold her tongue. I have trusted you before this, haven't I?" pulling up my chin that he might dry my eyes with his own handkerchief, and shedding into their wet depths the sweet brightness of a smile that made him to me the handsomest of men. "I am not very wise about signs, but I don't think it can be lucky to cry long on Christmas Eve. And it would never do,"—he stooped to say it in my ear—"for Somebody to think we are not glad to see her."

As I ran up stairs to bathe my face and brush my hair, I heard the door of "the chamber" open, and in the hall the voices and footsteps of my father and younger uncles, expectant and hospitable. I flew to an upper window in time to see the carriage at the gate in the wan shimmer cast by the yellowish clouds where

the sun had gone down. Four men were hurrying down the walk. Mr. Bradley sprang out before they reached the gate. An imposing bevy attended the young ladies to the house. The shorter of the two had my Uncle Stirling on one side and my father on the other. The stripling Wythe, her vehement admirer, walked abreast of these, carrying her shawl and hand-basket. Mr. Bradley stayed behind to superintend the unpacking of the chariot he had seen loaded with Christmas parcels. He drew them out with his own hands, and gave them to the servants in waiting. The wind made a merry mixture of voices and laughter. Uncle Archie gave his left arm to his weary sister, brought on the other sundry bundles of fragile articles, too precious to be intrusted to rough or careless bearers.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CENTURY and three-quarters agone—very far back in the seventeen hundreds—there lived in one of the midland counties of Virginia a rich Frenchman, Pierre St. Jean by name. He owned a fertile plantation and many slaves, and worked both with diligence that earned for him from his leisure-loving neighbors the title of "miserly skinflint." He had neither wife nor child, and was the only white person on his estate. A traditional anecdote runs that an inquisitive neighbor plied him, when he was in his eightieth year, with questions as to the disposition he intended to make of his hoards.

The old man was sitting in his porch, overlooking cotton and tobacco-fields specked with laborers, low-

grounds of corn skirting the river, and uplands waving with golden wheat ready for the scythe. He was bent almost double with age and rheumatism, his skin was tan-colored and dry as a drum-head, but his beady black eyes snapped wickedly at the bore's importunities.

"Sare!" he snarled, "in all ze time I 'ave live' in zis so villain countree I 'ave save' joos' t'ree 'undred pence. I s'all leave zis in mine veel to my grandmozzer, who still live in Paree, and dance at ze Court balls."

It has almost passed from the minds of those now living that, up to the year 1776, the Church of England was the "Establishment" in the Old Dominion as really as in the Mother Country. Mr. Jefferson, through whose bold pressure of a bill for the "Abolition of General Assessment for the Established Church" all denominations were put upon an equal footing, says of the period preceding this salutary enactment:

"In process of time, however, other sectarisms were introduced, chiefly of the Presbyterian family. The established clergy, secure for life in their glebes and salaries, adding to these generally the emoluments of a classical school, found employment enough in their farms and school-rooms for the rest of the week, and devoted Sunday only for the edification of their flock by service and a sermon at their parish church. Their other pastoral functions were little attended to. Against this inactivity the zeal and industry of sectarian preachers had an open and undisputed field, and by the time of the Revolution a majority of the inhabitants had become dissenters from the Established Church, but were still obliged to pay contributions to support the pastors of the minority. This unrighteous compulsion to maintain teachers of what they deemed religious errors was grievously felt during the regal government, and without a hope of relief."

Thomas Jefferson was not born, and public men had not begun to bestir themselves to right the wrong of which complaints were circulating in discontented whispers, when there was talk of erecting a parish church in the godless vicinage in which Pierre St. Jean was the principal land-holder. At the first breath of the project he astonished the county by offering to give the ground for church and glebe-farm. His reasons for the action were substantially the same with those that led to the erection of the little church at the gates of the Ferney chateau.

"Ze church is one almost as good t'ing as ze police," he represented to the committee who were collecting funds for the enterprise. "Ve cannot in one land so new and savage as zis 'ave ze police; zen ze church by all mean. I s'all send all my servants, and *veep* zem if zey do not go. Perhaps zey veel be afraid of ze priest, and ze fire eternal, and steal not so mooch of my corn and peach-brandy."

He aroused himself from his customary absorption in his own affairs so far as to overlook the work when begun. The vestrymen favored another location for the church and encompassing burial-ground than that desired by him, but he carried his point. The building was set up on a natural bank scarcely twenty-five yards from the highway, and within sight of the small dwelling which was the heart of the Bienvenu (pronounced "Benvenew" by the neighbors) tract. The glebe-farm and parsonage were two miles away. It was evident that the house of worship was designed as a family chapel, an appanage of M. St. Jean's estate. Money and stubbornness won the day, and he testified a sneering consciousness of their supremacy over consideration for the religious welfare of the community by registering in the deed of gift that the church was made

over to the parish by "Pierre St. Jean's will." He said by his "veel," and by the passage of the story through many mouths, the plain wooden structure perched on the roadside, although formally dedicated as "St. Philip's," was known generally as "Old Singinsville."

After the disestablishment it became by degrees "a free church," *i. e.*, one in which several denominations had acknowledged right. The Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians each held services in it one Sunday in the month, leaving a fourth for the original owners. When a fifth Sunday occurred the Episcopalians took that also, by a sort of courteous and somewhat pathetic recognition of their former lordly estate. The four sects assumed the duty in common of keeping the premises in repair, no one feeling especially obliged to see that this was well done.

This is the history in brief of "Old Singinsville," as it is known to this day, none, except the neighborhood antiquarian having any knowledge of the title of which the uncouth appellation is a perversion, or why the adjective of age is prefixed.

On Christmas Sunday two carriages from Summerfield set down their loads at the church-door. It was an ugly, oblong frame house, the paintless clap-boards and shingles dark-gray at their underlapping, shading into black at the outer edges. A door like that of a barn, and two long, shutterless windows were set in the gable nearest the road; five other windows on each long side, and two more in the farther gable. Between these last was the pulpit. Farm-fences—the well-known rail zigzags—bounded the church-yard on the north and east. The west end of the building backed up into a pine wood that ran down the hill to a creek at the bottom. Toward the highway the area was open, and be-

tween this and the church-door all vestiges of the grave-yard had been obliterated. Beyond the wheel-track leading to and from the steps, tall hickories and oaks had shot up since the abolition of the *ancien régime*, heaving flat grave-stones and wrapping their roots about the forgotten bones below. Here and there a tangle of honeysuckle and white-rose bushes, the scraggy stems yellow with moss, or a hardy arbor-vitæ tree bore testimony to love that had watched above the precious dust a long generation ago. Old Pierre St. Jean's will decreed that he should be buried as near the church as the grave could be dug without injuring the foundation. He had slept for a hundred years right under the drip of the gutterless eaves, and the continual dropping had worn away the two lines that recorded his name, birth and death.

The negroes believed that he walked on winter nights about and about the walls raised at his "vill," banished from Heaven for his sins, but respited from the place of torment at certain seasons, that he might look for a few hours upon the monument of the solitary good deed he had performed while wearing his meagre garment of flesh. On stormy midnights he had been seen carrying a blue lantern slowly around the church, examining the foundation stones cemented under his eye. While they held together his imprisonment was to have the temporary mitigation of these earthly visits. His estate had been sold at his death and the proceeds sent to an address in France given in his last will and testament. The plantation was parceled into three freeholds. His house took fire in the night and burned to the ground shortly after his demise.

Aunt Betsey had told me the tale with many illustrative incidents, and it was a pearl of price to me pending the Sabbath ministrations of such godly and

long-winded brethren as Rev. Mr. Watts, the Baptist incumbent, and our own pastor, Mr. Burgess. There was Presbyterian preaching twice a month at Mt. Hermon, a neat, new church just beyond the outskirts of the Summerfield plantation. On the remaining Sabbaths we took such chances of spiritual profit as "free churches" afforded.

Given board and charcoal, I could reproduce the interior of the edifice on the site of which now stands a hideous rectangle of cheap brick—still "Singinsville," and sometimes "New."

The benches must have been of lignum-vitæ, or possibly petrified wood, for no others were ever so hard, and had never known the touch of a paint-brush. The backs were carved and lettered on the outside with industry and into intricacy rivaling the master-pieces wrought with tools as rude by monks, with nothing else to do, on stall and reredos and lectern, in medieval chapels. Lovers' knots with intertwined initials; linked and scarified hearts; horses leaping fences, in full run, standing with and without riders; caricatures of the human face and form; dogs, foxes, birds—were cut or drawn carelessly, or with much painstaking, by men whose pockets, from six up to eighty-six, were never without a stout English jack-knife. The side of the church devoted to the gentler and neater sex was almost as profusely decorated as that on which sat their husbands and brothers—a puzzle explained by the frequent use of the building, since it became "free," for political and other secular assemblies. One of the many inscriptions penciled on the dingy whitewash of the walls must, I imagined, have been written during service. I had settled in my own mind that it was done while Mr. Watts had his eyes shut in "the long"—oh, how long!—prayer. My seat on this Sunday was, as I liked to have

it, within easy eye-range of the pessimistic doggerel. It was engrossed in a fair, clerkly hand, and ran thus:

> "Some go to church to laugh and talk;
> Some for a pleasant ride or walk;
> Some to show the last new dress;
> Some to court a Kate or Bess;
> Some to meet a business friend;
> Some the heavy hours to spend;
> Many go to sleep and nod;—
> But, ah! who goes to worship GOD?"

I used to fancy the cynical smile with which the writer surveyed the congregation between the lines. He must have been tall, I thought, with dark hair and lively eyes. His coat fitted him well; his hand was elegant in shape, and he wrote with a gold pencil-case like Mr. Bradley's. The whole proceeding was very wicked, as were the sacrilegious etchings on wainscot and bench-backs. Nevertheless, I was as exceedingly glad of them as Jonah of his palm-christ (which was *not* a gourd).

This was Mr. Watts' day in course at Old Singinsville, and it was his lank ungainliness that undid one joint at a time until a lugubrious countenance, set off into gloom by straight hair and the thick-set roots of a blue-black beard, a pair of round shoulders and very long arms incased in a rusty black coat, were visible above the boxed-in desk. "We will begin the services of the Lord's Day by singing the 375th hymn," he plained, as one bewails his first-born.

> "'Show pity, Lord! Oh Lord, forgive!
> Let a repenting sinner live!'

The words are so familiar that I deem it hardly necessary to give out the lines."

He set the tune himself—the wildly-mournful numbers I halted but yesterday beneath the windows of a "colored church" in the street of a Northern city to hear. The audience took it and the words away from

him before he finished the first line, bore the melody with increasing spirit from one verse to another until the air swayed and swung with it from wall to wall. Hardy old planters—their hats on the floor between their knees, with horsewhips sticking up in them, like spoons in so many toddy-tumblers—gave it out with the blast of leathery lungs, beating time with big cow-skin boots. Their delicate-featured wives sang it with closed eyes, folded hands, and heads gently vibrative to the favorite measure. Aunt Betsey's tenor skimmed the levels of the music with an easy lope and took the bar-leaps like a bird. Across the aisle from us the sonorous "brum-brum" of Uncle Archie's voice supplied the deeper notes that had else been wanting from the really noble harmony. From the servants' gallery in the rear of the audience-room poured over our heads a thunderous rush of song.

It took one-quarter of Brother Watts' long prayer to let my nerves and fancies down to the regulation level of sanctuary dullness. Our Mr. Burgess once informed a youthful theologue in my hearing that "the monosyllable 'ACTS' formed an excellent epitomical guide in the composition of the principal prayer offered in public worship. This should begin with Adoration, proceed to Confession, rise into Thanksgiving and close with Supplication."

After which I held to the private belief that Mr. Watts' mnemonic recipe must be a polysyllable with never a letter left out. Grown men stood or sat at their ease while he wailed from station to station of the penitential progress. Devout Presbyterian women bowed their heads upon the backs of the seats before them. Baptist sisters sometimes—Methodists and Episcopalians always—knelt, and so did children as a rule, this being the easiest posture for themselves and least troublesome

to their guardians. I had an established fashion of settling myself, as squarely as was compatible with human anatomy, upon my knees, my elbows on the stony-hearted bench, my chin in my hollowed palms. I could keep my eyes closed for perhaps five minutes, then the lids arose as on springs and refused to shut more. Turn about I might not, any more than I might rise or wriggle; but, my scooping hands serving as blinders, I could regard whatever went on immediately behind me, as seen beneath the horizontal rails of the seat-back. It was a genuine comfort when the woman who occupied this space wore a gayly-figured gown, a cross when it was black silk, an offense if it chanced to be a sheenless bombazine. Once, when Miss Harry Macon sat in this place, she opened her hymn-book on her knee, the bottom of the page toward me, holding it so that I could easily read it. I learned two new hymns before I got up. I always liked Miss Harry after that. Usually, however, the dead numbness of the knees, the tingles and pricks of the cramped arms were a bagatelle beside the dreary vacuity of mind that overtook me about the middle of the prayer. I could not remember a period when Mr. Watts was not droning out his petitions, or forecast a time when he would cease to pray. If I aroused myself spasmodically by the reflection that what had been might be again—that I had felt just as now over and over again, yet lived to go home and eat my Sunday dinner in great peace of body and mind—the relief died soon before the "staying power" of the good man's voice, rising and falling like an evening breeze in a pine grove, with an awful earnest of endless continuity in the monotony of its moan.

He did stop to-day, and, as heretofore, just in season to save me from dissolution, or the disgrace of "speaking

out in meeting" to preserve life and reason. Then he read ten sections of the 119th Psalm, and "lined out" a second hymn. This sung, the sermon was due. Instead of announcing his text, he unclosed a wide, thin-lipped mouth to say, in the same doleful key that had given forth hymn, prayer and psalm:

"I am rejoiced" (!) "to communicate to you this morning, my dear Christian friends, the good tidings that our beloved Brother Dudley, whose name is familiar to you all and whose face is known to many, whose work in the vineyard the Master hath been pleased to bless in times past and now, is with us to-day by an enactment of Divine Providence, and will preach for us at this time. I take this occasion to give notice that I expect to preach next Sunday, God willing, at Muddy Creek; on the second Sunday in January at Red Lane, and on the third Sabbath of that month at Bethel."

A manifest sensation fluttered his dear Christian friends at the name of the orator of the day. Glancing at Grandma's face as she sat erect in the corner of the long bench, I fancied that a troubled wave broke up the solemn calm of her eyes. Aunt Betsey raised her eyebrows in response to Aunt Maria's apprehensive look. The corners of Miss Virginia's rosy mouth relaxed, and she shot a swift flash under her eyelids over the way where sat Uncle Archie and Mr. Bradley. Both young men saw the mirthful appeal, Uncle Archie meeting it with a gleam of quiet sympathy in her amusement, the other in undisguised enjoyment of the prospective discourse. As Mr. Watts had said, everybody had heard of Brother Dudley. Nowadays, he would be called a "hard-shell" and a "sensation preacher." In that era of noted revivalists, he was considered by the more staid of even his own sect as eccentric. Some were disposed to question the expediency of suffering him to continue his

official ministrations. Once, after some unusually extravagant expressions on his part and of boisterous merriment on that of certain of his auditors, he was cited to answer before the State Association for "unbecoming levity of speech, approximating irreverence." He received the remonstrances of his peers with humility, but protested, even with tears, that he never meant to say or do aught derogatory to the cause he presented or the sacred desk in which he stood. He spoke as he was moved by the Spirit; but they must not forget that Divinity speaking through man must take human voice and language.

"King David himself, with the Chief Musician and Asaph to lend a hand, couldn't get the same music out of a banjo as out of his harp," he represented in his defense; "an' even the breath of the Lord would sound different in a French bugle from what 'twould in the 'toot! *toot!* TOOT!' of a tin dinner-horn!"

"Brother Dudley! *Brother Dudley!*" called the chairman. "You are guilty again of the very impropriety with which you stand charged!"

The rebuked man begged pardon penitently. He would endeavor prayerfully in future to avoid the error he had just proved to be so easily-besetting. He entreated the brethren to be patient with him—above all, not to deprive him of the glorious privilege of preaching the Gospel. His meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent him; his thought, hope, prayer that he might be the means of warning his fellows, his kinsmen according to the flesh, to flee from the wrath to come. He told how hard he worked, how poorly he lived, how many miles he rode every year, how many sermons he had preached, how wistfully he sought out ways and wiles by which to win souls. Hard labor and coarse fare, poverty and contempt he accounted as

nothing. If he *had* any goods, he would take joyfully their spoiling if so be he might secure for others treasure in Heaven. He wound up in perfectly good faith in this wise:

"I don't pick fine words, nor stop to parse sentences. So long 's they hold together, I let 'em fly, knowin' thar 's j'ints in every harness that the Lord knows about, ef I don't. Throwin' stones out o' the brook is my business—guidin' 'em to Goliath's skull is the Lord's. I ain't always as particular maybe as I oughter be to see that they're smooth an' to wipe off the mud from them on my coat-sleeve, 'specially when the Philistine is comin' for me full tilt, an' Israel is a-turnin' their backs to the enemy. But, bless your soul, honey, whar 's the odds, so long 's I make the devil run like smoke? I 'd preach corn-stalk-fiddle-an'-shoe-string-bow ef that kind o' lingo would save sinners!"

The chorus of a popular husking ("shucking" in Virginia) song began with "A corn-stalk fiddle and a shoe-string bow," and every grave divine there could have whistled it. Brother Dudley was admonished to be wary of speech, yet assured that he retained the confidence and respect of his brethren, and dismissed after a prayer from the most dignified member of the body that he might be long spared to the world and the church.

He was a man of medium height, well knit together. His hair was iron-gray, and bristled up, stiff as wires, over shrewd eyebrows. His eyes were full and keen, his expression quietly benevolent until he began to speak. His cravat was loosely tied, and he had a trick of tugging at it when excited in declamation as if it oppressed his breathing. Other men wore black satin or silk stocks, and finical people objected that this wisp of a 'kerchief about his throat gave him an affectedly rakish

air unbecoming his office. His coat was baggy and the sleeves too short, having evidently been made, and probably worn, by a fatter man who was not so tall as the present owner. His voice was powerful and somewhat harsh in the upper register. The lower tones were extremely sweet and flexible.

He began the performances on this occasion by dragging the Bible from the sloping wooden shelf that was the pulpit desk, and handing it to Mr. Watts, who was sitting behind him—a significant clearance of decks for action.

"In the first book of the Bible," was the exordium, "written as I 've understood by Moses, pretty well on towards the middle of the book an' a leetle furder along than the middle of a chapter, you 'll find these words—when you go home an' look for 'em :

"'*The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.*'

"I 'm not goin' to tell you the name o' the book, nor the number of chapter an' verse. I mean you shall do that much s'archin' the Scripters for yourselves. I 'm mighty afraid some o' you will blow off dust from the leds o' your Bibles that will rise up a cloud o' condemnation ag'inst you on the las' day—a thick dust that won't let you see the face o' Him that sitteth on the throne. A neglected Bible is dumb enough now. It lies as still as a roach in the bottom of a mill-pond just whar you laid it down the las' time you were in trouble—the night your wife died, or your boy had the croup, or maybe when the sun shone so blue las' summer. You've piled other books on it an' it never groaned nor stirred—not so much as to rustle the *Whig* nor the *Enquirer*, nor the almanac that lays atop of all—the things you *do* read an' take an int'rest in.

"The fifth prophet before the New Testament tells

us of a time when the stone shall cry out o' the wall, an' the beam out o' the timber shall answer it. But that outcry will be like the singin' of a black gnat in your ear compared with the awful shout that will go up from a fam'ly Bible that 's never looked into except when somebody 's born or married or dead, or almost skeered out o' his senses.

"My text is *thar*, whether you look for it or not!

"'The sun had risen upon the earth.' And what o' that? If thar 's one thing more certain than death an' sin an' sorrow in this world it is that the sun 's a-goin' to rise in the mornin'. I 'll bet my head 'most all o' you say more'n once every week o' your lives, 'Sure 's the sun will rise to-morrow.' As if you 'd bespoke it an' paid your cash down to the showman! Like 's not 'twas just as pat a saying in Sodom. 'I 'll pay you that debt sure 's the sun rises to-morrow mornin',' says one the night befo' that day o' burnin' an' brimstone an' gnawin' o' tongues for pain, when the wicked cities were wiped clean off the face o' the globe like you 'd take a drop o' tar off the hub of a wheel with a greasy rag—wiped off and throwed away for all time.

"'I love you, sure 's the sun 'll rise an' set to-morrow,' says another, lookin' into his sweetheart's blue eyes. An' another shakes his fist in his enemy's face an' says, 'I 'll be even with you for this certain as the sun 'll rise to-morrow!'

"Well, the sun is up! He 's cleared the tops o' the pine trees on the mountains over yonder, an' a-shinin' hot an' bright 'cross the plain, on streets full o' folks, marryin' an' givin' in marriage, an' buyin' an' sellin' an' eatin' an' drinkin'. On the rascally gang that was hullabalooin' under Lot's winders las' night. On Lot's sons-in-law, a-splittin' their sides a-laughin' at the 'ole man's new maggot in the brain,' arfter they 'd seen

him an' his wife an' two single daughters a-runnin' out o' the gates, licketysplit for the mountain, skeered for nothin'! An' not one o' the thousan's o' sinners seen death hangin' over his head in that black cloud a-rollin' up in the west, spittin' out lightnin's an' roarin' with the blast of hell! They took life, an' meant to take eternity, as easy as you do who come here to-day in your cushioned carriages or on your slick horses, sayin' how lucky it was the weather had changed so 's to give you a pleasant Sunday, an' how much store you set by the fourth Sunday at Old Singinsville, for everybody and his wife is sure to be there for you to see.

"*They* didn't see destruction, but it overtook them! Not one head will be lifted out o' the Dead Sea on the evenin' o' the day they met so gayly—the sea that 's nothin' but a pot o' pitch, hot with the wrath of the Almighty—to look the red sun in the face and say, 'I 'll forsake the works o' darkness an' turn with my whole heart to the Lord, sure as that sun will rise to-morrow!' Charred corpses cannot repent; ears stopped with b'ilin' slime couldn't hear if the Lord of Life was standin' on the edge of the smokin' pit Abraham saw a-steamin' up to Heaven, miles an' miles off, an' callin', 'Look unto Me and be saved!'

"O thou long-sufferin' an' pitiful Saviour! who would not that any should die, but that all should come to Thee for salvation! Is it then true that thar is a limit to the day of mercy? The grave cannot praise Thee; death cannot celebrate Thee; they that go down to the pit cannot hope for Thy truth!

"That risin' sun saw Somethin' in the middle o' the plain that war'n't thar when he went down las' night. Somethin' white as the drifted snow, that yet war'n't soft, nor pure, nor cold. Somethin' hard an' shiny as marble, that no builder would tech with hammer nor

chisel ef thar war'n't another rock in a thousan' miles. For it was a woman ten minutes ago. A woman that loved her husban' an' children, or she wouldn't 'a' come out o' Sodom even at the angels' order; a woman that run well for a while an' then—*looked back!* That was her sin. It must 'a' been a great sin, or it wouldn't 'a' been so terribly punished, for the Lord always leans to the side o' mercy. Thar were plenty o' reasons why she mought 'a' looked over her shoulder to the losin' of her soul—women's reasons, every one of 'em! She 'd left a heap of things in that town that women think valuable. Her furniture an' fine clothes—*her Sunday bonnet*—an' neighbors an' married daughters. She mought easily have reasoned it out to herself arfter she got her breath an' wits together, that 'twas unjust an' cruel to yank her out o' her home so sudden befo' she could so much as pick up her key-basket. Maybe she had gran'children, with their innercent, coaxin' ways, as dear to her as that sweet little thing" (pointing to a child in the front seat that had fallen asleep on her mother's lap) "is to you, my sister. As beautiful in in her sight as the crowin', kickin' youngster you kissed in his cradle befo' you come to the house o' God this mornin', my dear madam!

"Maybe, ag'in, Lot's wife wanted to see ef the jedgment had fallen yet upon the roofs an' chimneys she knew so well—ef her house *was* burnt with fire an' all her pleasant places laid waste. P'raps—onct mo'—she didn't half believe what the angels had tole her, an' hadn't so much respec' for her husban's opinion as to take his word ag'inst her sons-in-law's. I've seen sech women—yes! an' more men who didn't order their households so well as to entitle them to duty and obedience. Guessin' an' sposin' an' wonderin' are idle words now when she's been a pillar o' salt for thou-

sands o' years. It 's enough for us to know the solemn lesson that she flew—a poor, silly, mealy-winged moth—in the face o' the Lord an'—suffered accordin'ly!

"An' whar, let me ask in the nex' place, was Lot all this time? Lot—the one righteous man who mought 'a' saved even guilty Sodom ef Abraham had stood to his guns a minute longer an' not taken too much for granted? Lot—that had sot on the knees of his uncle, the Friend o' God, hundreds o' times at family prayers? Lot—that Abraham had fought (with only one hundred an' eighteen nigger servants!) four kings for, an' brought back safe an' sound with all his goods? Lot—that had seen Melchizedech, a greater than Abraham, an' heard his blessin'—even the blessin' of him who, Paul says, was 'Priest o' the Most High God, King of Righteousness, and after that, King of Salem, which is King of Peace'?"

At this moment an extraordinary interruption occurred.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAN walked up the aisle of the church with a horse-block on his shoulder. A horse-block—be it known to the modern citizen—is a log of wood sawed across the grain and set upright on the ground, to be used by women and short-legged boys in mounting to their saddles. There was always one large one, with two or three lower logs arranged as steps, near every church-door. Several single-barreled ones stood under the trees at Old Singinsville, varying in height from eighteen inches to two and a-half feet. One of these, a stout block of hickory, the late comer lowered from his shoulder in the open space surrounding the pulpit—the chancel on Episcopalian Sundays—and close to the big iron stove that heated the building. This settled to his liking, he shook himself like a water-dog, and a camlet cloak of red-and-green plaid dropped away from him, displaying a full suit of yellow flannel—an ugly, vicious, brimstone yellow, almost matched by a head of coarse, foxy hair. His skin had the hard flush of the habitual drunkard. Not a glimpse of white showed above a black stock, and on his feet were boots of undressed calfskin of the same general complexion as his clothes.

He was an eerie and revolting apparition in the well-dressed and well-mannered congregation. Captain Macon half arose from his seat, his fingers closing nervously on his riding-whip, when the cloak fell off, perhaps in resentment of the possible caricature of his scarlet coat. Every gentleman in the house was on the alert to check

more overt insult to the place and audience. Thus far, the man had not laid himself open to reproof or chastisement. His garb was peculiar in color, but so was Captain Macon's, and since the benches were all full he had a right to provide a seat for himself. He was perfectly grave in aspect, even when he put both feet on the low box filled with sand surrounding the stove, took a handful of peanuts—otherwise "ground" or "goober-peas"—from his pocket, and began to eat them vigorously, tossing the shells among the tobacco-quids, in various stages of desiccation, that besprinkled the sandy surface.

Some present knew enough of him to grasp the situation at sight. His name was Roger Jones; but he had deservedly won the title of "Rowdy Roger" by drunken pranks and general disreputableness. In July of this year he had disturbed the decorum of a "protracted meeting" by unseemly antics, and been severely and publicly rebuked by Mr. Dudley. The fellow had stood up in his place and offered to fight the preacher then and there.

"Sit down, young man!" was the stinging retort. "I am too busy with bigger game—to wit, the devil—to waste time mashing fleas."

The poor creature had actually obeyed in utter abashment, under the stern eyes of the speaker and the laugh called forth by the reply, but from that day had cudgeled his fuddled brains to devise fresh means of persecution of his opponent, following him from place to place to practice low tricks by which to distract the notice of Mr. Dudley's congregations without putting himself within reach of the law. Those of the audience who had not heard the story supposed him to be a lunatic or fool, without suspecting the animus of the witless freak.

Not a line of the minister's face betrayed conscious-

ness of his entrance. When the increasing solemnity of tone and manner recalled the senses of his hearers, he was using Sodom as a type of the city of destruction, and describing three classes who were warned to escape therefrom:

First, the openly profane and reckless, as illustrated by Lot's sons-in-law, and the vain fellows composing the nocturnal mob.

Secondly, those who hearing the alarm heeded it so far as to begin their flight, then turned again with longing to their sins. *Vide* Lot's wife.

Thirdly, worldly, careless Christians, who had been lured by wealth and pleasure into dwelling in the tents of wickedness, and were saved, so as by fire. He said "by the skin of their teeth."

"We will deal with these last first," he continued when the heads were stated. "I have been given to understand that they are as plentiful in these fat low-grounds an' rich tobacco lands 'round about Old Singinsville as persimmons in Fluvanna, an' watermillions in Hanover, an' sweet potatoes in Nansemond County. Speritual laziness has been the natural consequence o' high livin' ever sence Jeshurum waxed fat an' kicked arfter he 'd been fed upon honey an' oil, butter, milk, fat lambs, wheat flour an' the juice o' the grape. I haven't seen more store clothes in a country church in a month o' Sundays than I am lookin' at now. Jeremiah mought 'a' made out his list o' the contraptions worn by the daughters o' Zion in his time without budgin' from these pulpit-steps, writin' on a sheet o' paper laid on the top o' his hat."

He told us how "Lot, half-hearted toward God, whole-hearted toward Mammon, vexed his soul from day to day with his neighbors' unlawful deeds, yet stood it out because he made money out o' these sinners. He

had driven a sharp bargain with easy old Abraham when he chose the plain o' Jordan, watered like the garden of the Lord, an' let the uncle that had brought him up—an orphan boy—scratch a livin' out o' the sand an' broom-straw of Mamre. It never entered the smart Jew's head that the Lord would use the dusty roads in which Abraham traveled ankle-deep to give him some notion of the multitude of his descendants; that the sandy bottoms where he 'd pitched his tent under the one scrub-oak that could make out to live there would be trodden by His blessid feet. It 's a pretty safe thing, in the long run, to trust the Almighty for bread and butter. There 's hundreds that call themselves believers who can't do that. They look out for their bodies, but commit the keepin' o' their *souls* unto Him. I don't know, sometimes, but 'twould be fa'r to take their souls at their own valuation, ef we 're to judge from the care they take of 'em. In that case, forty-seven of 'em could play 'prisoner's base' on a seed-tick's back, an' never hit each other's elbows!"

He painted Lot "lingerin', lingerin', loath to travel with his foot in his hand, as the sayin' is, when he had money in the Sodom an' Gomorrah bank, besides real estate, an' nobody knows how many head o' cattle. Lingerin' an' whinin' until even the angels los' patience, an'—mark the words!—'the Lord being merciful unto him,' they laid holt o' him an' dragged him out by the nape o' the neck. Then in the plain, the comin' tempest bellowin' in the distance, he begged to be allowed to go to Zoar. 'Sech a little bit of a town!' he argers. 'Hardly worth the trouble o' burnin' up, nor the brimstone 'twould take to do it!' But it was a city, an' he didn't take to the notion o' livin' in the mountains, where thar warn't a neighbor in half a mile. That 's *Jew* all over! To this day they 've no taste for the

country. Trade in men's souls ain't lively enough for them there. Not that country Christians don't improve their opportunities for backslidin'. An' wagons ain't apt to stall goin' down hill, even in sech stiff mud as that in the road leading to the creek yonder. The devil knows he can take care of the lead horse when the load gets fa'rly started down.

"But you 'll tell me that Lot was saved; that he couldn't be lost, seein' he was truly a child o' God; that your callin' an' election 's sure. Ef thar 's one trick meaner 'n another upon the pock-marked face o' this cranky old earth, it is sneakin' behind the 'perseverance o' the saints' in order to have an excuse for sin. The Lord has you under the covert o' His wings; tharfore you can wound the Saviour in the house o' His friends. He 's drawn you out o' the horrible pit an' the miry clay an' set your feet upon the Rock of Ages—an' you cut a pigeon-wing to the scrapin' o' Satan's fiddle! Now, let me give you a plain piece o' my mind! The man that can reason an' feel in that way had better look mighty keerful at his 'listment papers. Maybe, my easy citizen o' Zion, you 've got holt o' the wrong dockerment. Somebody else has been called, an' you 've answered; an' as for your election, it won't stan' in the Supreme Court. A real believer don't *want* to sin. Put that in your pipe an' smoke it! I can't think so bad o' Lot, money-worshippin' Jew as he was, as to b'lieve that he ever put it squar' before him that he was doin' wrong. You recollect the man in 'Pilgrim's Progress' that was robbed on the road to the Celestial City? The thieves didn't get his jewels—that is, his title-deeds to heaven. They were hid too safe. But they stole all his spendin'-money—the loose change he had for travelin' expenses, tavern fare, an' horse hire an' so on. That 's the way with you sleepy, take-it-

comfortably, yea-nay Christians. You are beggin' your way to the New Jerusalem. On Sundays you get a bone the Marster has thrown over His shoulder from one o' the children's plates. You pick up a dry crust of a hoe-cake at a pra'r-meetin'. Onct in a while, at a rousin' revival, when others are enjoyin' a feast o' fat things, you say, 'Thanky, my Marster!' for a fa'r plate o' bacon an' greens. You are never full—never in good order. Your ribs stare you in the face, an' you deefen the ears o' the Lord's faithful ones with the howls o' 'My leanness! my leanness!' I haven't a doubt now that ef the eyes o' all in this house could be opened this blessid minute to discern speritual bodies, we should see about us enough rack-a-bone skeletons, festooned with filthy rags o' self-righteousness, to scare away all the crows this side o' the Blue Ridge."

His dealing with the almost-saved was yet more faithful, and mingled with a tenderness of protest that found no place in his treatment of avowed scoffers—defiant blasphemers.

"Brother Watts!" he said abruptly, turning to him, "please open that Bible at the tenth Psalm, thirteenth verse, and first clause o' the fourteenth, an' rise up an' read what you find thar. Thar may be some here who wouldn't b'lieve that I read it right."

He stepped aside. Mr. Watts, in no wise disconcerted by the singular requisition, got up and spread the bulky volume on the sloping shelf. While he turned the leaves slowly in quest of the passage, we heard the cracking of the goober-pea shells in the horny fingers of the man in yellow, the crunching of the nuts between his jaws, so profound was the silence. Mr. Watts' quavering wail gave the solemn words:

"'Wherefore do the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it!'

"'Thou *hast* seen it! For Thou beholdest mischief and spite to requite it with Thy hand.'"

"Thank you, brother!" Mr. Dudley advanced again to the front. "Now, how many of you noticed next to the last word in that first sentence—that word, '*contemn?*' Thar 's another word so much like it in sound, I 'm afraid some o' you mought not 'a' understood that thar 's a *t*, an' not a *d* in this one. It means to neglect, to treat slightingly, to despise. The wicked contemn God. He hath said in his heart, 'Thou wilt not require it.' Require *what?* The slights you 've heaped upon His word, upon His Sabbath, upon His laws, upon the mercy an' love an' bloody sacrifice o' His blessid Son. You 've gone swingin' 'long the middle o' the road, whistlin' jig-tunes, kickin' opportunities an' priviliges an' warnin' judgments out o' the way like they were so many gravel-stones, tramplin' down all holy an' precious things like you would gimsen'-weed an' pursley. But there is One who has seen and kept tally o' every despised offer o' grace, every chance o' salvation. The time is comin' in which you 'll see 'em all ag'in, piled into a mountain whose top shall reach the skies, thunderin' an' lightnin' like Sinai, an' fallin' over on your frightened soul to bury it a million fathoms deep in the bottomless pit. 'An' the smoke of their torment ascended up forever.' Thar 'll be no end to the burnin' o' that Sodom, not even a Dead Sea of forgetfulness to put out the fire and the memory of them who are wallowin' in it. You have laughed when your mother or your wife begged you with strong cryin' an' tears to stop in your evil courses. My merry friend, the Lord has put those tears in His bottle, an' every drop will be a blister upon your naked soul. Each slighted prayer and sermon will hang like a mill-stone about your neck, while you 're sinkin' down! *down!* DOWN!

You have 'pooh-poohed!' at the prayers an' warnin's an' teachin's o' God's ministers, puffin' them away like boys blow off dandelion seed, but the harvest shall be a heap in that day o' grief an' desperate sorrow. Oh, my soul! enter not thou into the secret of him who destroys himself, who laughs an' jokes while he slams the door of mercy in his own face, locks it an' throws away the key!

"For He will require it! Mark that! He has seen it. Mischief an' spite to requite it with His hand. Do you know what that means? Have you ever pulled up long enough on the down-hill road to say to yourself what the weight o' that hand is? The Hand that measures the heavens as you shut your fingers 'round your wine-glass; that taketh up the isles like you pinch up the few grains o' powder you spilt on the table in loadin' your gun; that holds the seas as you scoop up water from a spring in your palm. Dare you resk a blow from it? I want you to put that question to yourself in silence one minute. Go down on the knees of your heart, while all these Christian friends are prayin' for you, an' say in your soul, 'I have *contemned* Thee, Most Holy an' Most Mighty! Unless I repent Thou wilt *condemn* me. Can I endure it?'"

He drew out his watch and fixed his eyes on it. The stillness was dreadful. Eye, intonation and gesture showed the man to be in awful earnest. Those who were disposed at first to smile at his homely similes were grave enough by now. Sixty seconds ticked audibly by. Miss Harry Macon said afterward that they sounded to her like "Going! going! gone!" Rowdy Roger discharged a rattling handful of empty shells at the broadside of the stove, and champed noisily on a fresh supply of nuts, cocking his head on one side to leer at the preacher, like an impudent yellow-hammer.

Mr. Dudley put up the watch in his fob, began to speak again in a studiously quiet tone.

"I think it was Mr. Whitefield who, at the close of a sermon, called out to the recording angel he knew was thar, 'though he couldn't see him: 'Gabriel, wait one minute longer, and take to Heaven the news of the repentance an' pardon of at least *one* soul!' My hearers, that angel wouldn't 'a' stopped the nine-hundred-an'-ninety-ninth part of a second at the biddin' of all the Whitefields an' Wesleys an' Knoxes an' Summerfields that ever preached. Sence the Apostles fell asleep thar have been no Joshuas in the pulpit. The minute I have jus' counted is gone as completely as that which heard the click o' the hasp that fastened down Noah into the ark. It 's one of the drops of the ocean of eternity past, of whose number the Almighty, who was and is, and is to be, keeps account.

"I looked onct at a drop o' water in a microscope, an' it was *alive!* full o' squirmin', creepin', feelin' things. The man that owned the instrument said ef it had been a stronger glass we could 'a' seen thousands more, every one with life an' organs of its own. Thar 's no stronger lens than the eye of the Judge an' Maker o' us all. He saw in that drop o' time that slipped down while we were silent, all that passed in the hearts o' this congregation. The prayers an' longin's o' Christians over the dyin' souls about them; the sneers an' callousness of them that are past feelin'; maybe—I pray that in infinite mercy this may have been!—the outstretched hand of some drownin' wretch, as he cried, '*Lord, save, or I perish!*'"

The abrupt change of voice to impassioned supplication, the clasped hands uplifted, as were the streaming eyes, wrought powerfully upon the aspect of the crowd. Heads went down as bowed by a mighty wind; forms

shook with emotion; there was a sound of low sobbing and deep-drawn breaths throughout the house. The man in yellow stretched arms and jaws in a huge yawn, and addressed himself to an ostentatious examination of every pocket for one more peanut, drawing forth, at flourishing length, a red bandana handkerchief, jack-knife, wallet and a dozen miscellaneous articles, depositing them one by one in the hat between his knees.

"The showman told us another curious thing," pursued the speaker. "His was a solar microscope, an' he said thar were times when the sun was very hot an' the lenses very strong, that the weakly critturs among them in the drop o' water—the things that had fewest organs an' senses—*died* in crossin' the focus. The glare an' heat were more 'n they could stand. My dear friends, return thanks with me that God is more merciful than man. Ef He wasn't, what chance would there be of life? what hope of escape from blastin', shrivelin' up and annihilation under the burnin'-glass o' His indignation for a yaller imp o' the Evil One, who, on the birthday of the King of Glory, comes to His holy temple to insult His servants, an' to *chaw goober-peas!*"

The slow sweep of his arm consecrated the mean, defaced interior into a house of prayer; the box in which he stood was an altar from which he, the sword-bearer of the Spirit, the priest of the Most High, convicted the godless reptile, cowering under his blazing eyes, of sacrilege. Before the electric shock had so far subsided as to allow the auditors to perceive the comical side of the diatribe, he joined his hands and bent his head:

"Let us pray!"

Nearly all present fell upon their knees. I entered that hour into the meaning of a phrase already familiar to my ear—"wrestling in prayer." One was impressed irresistibly, in listening to him, with the figure of a

man fastening with clutching hands upon the King's robe, while plea and petition rushed to the lips almost too fast for utterance. As he implored an extension of the day of grace for the hardened offender who had played so conspicuous a part in the foreground of the morning scene, furtive steps passed down the aisle. A moment later the clattering of hoofs was heard among the grave-stones, the thud and splash of a gallop down the muddy road. Rowdy Roger was nowhere to be seen when we arose to receive the benediction.

The dispersion of a Virginia country congregation in those times was a curious spectacle to Northern eyes. Horses had been detached from carriages and gigs and tied to fences and trees, there to stand at ease during divine service. Some minutes were consumed in making them ready and bringing them up in turn to the entrance of the church. This interval, and often a much longer time, were passed in social greetings and kindly converse among neighbors and friends. No sooner was the "Amen!" of dismission pronounced than a general hand-shaking began, the occupants of the pews leaning forward or back to address those near them, without leaving their places. Old or infirm ladies often sat down again to await the summons to their chariots. Some elderly men strolled out to see that horses were unhitched and brought up. Younger cavaliers were prone to linger in lively chat with favorite belles, or pleasant exchange of compliments with mothers and chaperones. The outward procession was leisurely conducted, cronies gossiping, their faces under one another's bonnets; gay youths, carrying their hats in hands cast carelessly behind them, heads bent in attention or homage, escorted sweet-voiced, frank-eyed girls down the aisle and steps and handed them into their carriages. No lady was suffered to step in or out

of the door unassisted. There were always those on each side of the church steps ready to perform this gallant service alike for acquaintance and stranger.

Our home-party was divided into two bands. Grandma, Aunt Betsey, my mother and little Bessie, my sister, were bestowed in the Trueheart carriage. In that belonging to Summerfield were Aunt Maria, Miss Virginia, myself; and, just as the door was closing, Miss Harry Macon tripped up, with the petition that she might have a seat with us as far as the cross-roads.

"We have two tabbies in our carriage to-day. I want to escape for half an hour from spit and purr," she said when we were in motion. "Don't let Sid hear me, or he 'll tomahawk—or preach to—me when we get home," with a mock-timid glance at her grave brother, riding at Aunt Maria's window. "Aunt Deborah Macon and Aunt Peggy Branch arrived unexpectedly last night. I never knew such unexpected people! They always remind me of death in that respect—if in no other. They hate one another dearly, and met just at our outer gate. Neither would turn back for fear of pleasing the other."

"I saw them in church," remarked Aunt Maria. "We shall be happy to see them with you to-morrow. Will you ask them to excuse the informality of the invitation?"

"They shall die rather than come!" returned the beauty tranquilly. "I would administer ratsbane with my own fair hands. I have been counting upon to-morrow's fun for weeks past, and the lives of a couple of spinster aunts would not weigh the eighth of an ounce in the balance against the fulfillment of my wishes. Di can't come, poor thing! She has one of her sore throats —the seventeenth since we got home last September. That 's all the White Sulphur is good for! Sid, Rod and I will be with you, whether or no, and the sweet

maidens will eat their Christmas dinner with Papa. Both call him 'Brother,' both are slightly deaf and very sensitive on the score of the infirmity, and the dear, miserable man *will* roar first at one, then the other, and beg pardon when they start back and say in the same breath, 'My dear brother, one would suppose me to be hard of hearing from the way you pitch your voice!' Aunt Deborah is the woman who has never been seen with uncovered head since she put on caps at forty. She sleeps in my room, and always blows out the candle before she changes her day-cap for that she wears at night. Or, when I will sit up and read, keeping one eye on her, she steps out into the passage, and comes back night-capped."

Sidney Macon leaned toward us, his hand on the window-frame, leaving his horse, experienced in such attendance, to pick his way over the ruddy ruts of the road, avoiding as best he could collision with the wheels.

"What is she saying?" he asked, smiling indulgently at the rattle-pate.

"Making herself most entertaining, as usual," replied Miss Virginia, readily and prettily.

The Richmond girl was as popular with her own sex as with the other—an uncommon circumstance when one is an acknowledged belle. Her pouts and coquetries were so palpably feigned, she was so watchful of the comfort of all, elderly and young, so generous in the division with other women of the attentions that fell abundantly to her lot, so quick to say and to do gracious things, that malice and envy could not thrive in the balminess of her presence. She overlooked nobody and forgot nothing that was said to her. Her outward life was a study of peace on earth, good-will to men, with a liberal inclusion of women. She basked in and absorbed

sunlight as her natural aliment; radiated it in lambent gleams, after the manner of some affluent tropical flowers.

Miss Harry Macon sat opposite on the back seat, confessedly the handsomest girl in our county. Eighteen years old, taller by half a head than Miss Virginia and by an inch than Aunt Maria, straight as a palm, with a willowy grace of figure and movement; great gray eyes, black with the shadowing of curling lashes; spirited and almost faultless features; with a gay audacity of temper and tongue that mocked at rebuke and restraint—she was the motive-power in her home, the crowned leader of her little clique. She had been christened "Harriet Byron," in admiring recollection of the precise pink of maidenly affectation who writes out her own praises, virtues and conquest in the romance lauded by Captain Macon in his ill-fated wooing. The name suited her as well as a Quaker cap would have become the sparkling face, that had fun in every flash and roguishness in each dimple. The alteration to the semi-masculine sobriquet, to which she had answered from babyhood, was inevitable. Her sister, Diana Vernon, was, by a like contrariety of happening, a shy invalid, who seldom appeared abroad.

Miss Harry sported that day a costume more conspicuous then than it would be now—a black cloth gown, fitting as closely as a riding-habit, high in the neck, and with tight sleeves, while every other woman at church who made any pretense of following the fashion wore huge puffs between shoulders and elbows, often expanded by frames of buckram and wire. Her wrists and neck were trimmed with fur. A band of the same bordered her black hat, from the crown of which drooped a long scarlet feather. Her straight skirt, following the outlines of her lissome figure, fell to her feet

in classic folds. Miss Virginia's dark-blue silk pelisse and bonnet and Aunt Maria's dove-colored raiment were, in cut and material, more in accordance with the reigning mode. The combination of red and black, in high favor with our modern fashionists, was regarded fifty years back with peculiar disfavor. Even Mammy had been stirred out of her grave reserve by the sight of Miss Harry's attire when she first exhibited it at Summerfield, waylaying her in the hall to expostulate.

"Miss Harry, my dear young lady, you mustn't be mad with me! I been know you ever sence you was a baby. Honey, what you wear red an' black for? Don't you know it's mournin' for the devil, an' mighty bad luck?"

"Mammy! am I so near of kin to the old gentleman that I should be obliged to mourn for him if he *were* to be scalded to death in one of his own dinner-pots some day?" said the incorrigible, with a look of affected horror.

No other woman in six counties could have carried off this costume as she did, or indeed looked otherwise than absurd in it.

A cortége of horsemen overtook and accompanied our carriage. Sidney Macon kept his place at the right hand, pushed hard by his livelier brother Roderick, who talked persistently across him, watching for a chance to slip into closer proximity to the wheels. Mr. Bradley rode nearest the other window. Beyond these skirmished three or four others, flinging merry and gallant sayings to one and all of the three young ladies. Uncle Sterling, disdaining, as he put it, "to enter for a scrub-race," had ridden forward to a neighbor's carriage, and Wythe to join some collegians at home for the holidays. Uncle Archie was at one side of the coach, in which were his mother, aunt and sister; my father riding on

the other. They were right behind us, and I, sitting with my back to the horses, watched him with loving, grieving eyes. Miss Virginia always "preferred to ride backward," especially as Aunt Maria was apt to have a headache when she occupied this place. Uncle Archie had a full view of the face, radiant with happy smiles, brilliant with the color brought to the cheeks by the frosty kisses of the wind. I was provoked with him for having tarried to seat the elder ladies, instead of delegating the duty to his brother-in-law and riding on in season to secure the post which was his of right. He nodded smilingly in catching my yearning gaze, but I was not comforted. Nor was I deceived by his brave show of interest in my mother's talk. How was this possible when I was assured that the plump, perfectly-gloved hand laid caressingly on my lap held his heart and destiny?

At the cross-roads the carriage from Hunter's Rest was waiting for us at the side of the highway. The master, in his red coat, had alighted, to hold the door open for his darling's return. His fine gray head was uncovered every half minute in salutation to passers-by; the bridle of his horse hung in the crook of his elbow. Five or six young fellows sprang to the earth with the halting of the Summerfield equipage. The door flew wide, the steps were let down with a flourish, emulous hands were outstretched to assist the beauty's descent and guard her dress from the muddy wheels. In state that, to my fancy, might wait upon a princess of the blood, she was attended to the cushion over against that occupied by the brace of spinsters in black satin and curled false "fronts," who looked on in iced propriety, agreed for once in their virtuous disapproval of the display of homage to "that spoiled child." Harry waved her hand smilingly as the horses started.

Captain Macon bent to his saddle-bow; young heads were bared in farewell obeisances. Roderick and Sidney tarried for a word of adieu and promise for the morrow, then galloped on to join their father, and we turned off into the road leading homeward.

The bustle and ceremony, the festal tone, tempered with decorous remembrance of time and place, attendant upon these returnings from church, were to me, albeit all my life used to them, an unceasing and delicious excitement. It seemed such a grand thing—a life worth living—to be youthful and fair—a cup that never staled, lucent to the dregless depths, in which the minutes were glittering beads, breaking before the rising of others as bright and fresh.

"At last!" I heaved a wordless sigh as Uncle Archie touched his horse with the spur and appeared at Miss Virginia's side.

She looked up in her sweet, ingenuous way straight into his eyes.

"I think," she said, "that I never saw a more brilliantly beautiful girl than Harry Macon. If I were a man, I should fall madly in love with her. I don't see how any man can respect himself who does not. I hope," glancing severely from Mr. Bradley to the Read brothers, "that *you* all come up to your duty in this regard?"

Aunt Maria's gentle voice answered for them:

"My dear Virginia! what a disaster you are proposing! All three in love at once and with the same woman!"

CHAPTER X.

A WIDE world of whirling white out of doors. The Christmas storm which had set in at noon, and raged unremittingly until, in the premature twilight, to an observer on the front porch, the big walnut tree was but a darkening of the low-hanging glooms in that direction, except when the wind cleft the swaying curtain of snow with the cimeter of a hyperborean Saladin, and a black bough—like an arm shot up suddenly in prayer or execration—was thrust upon the view. The ground was already buried inches deep—the porch-steps were an inclined plane. Barn-yard noises—the tinkle of cow-bells, the answering calls of dams and calves and the more distant bleating of folded sheep—had the muffled sound as if heard through a woolly medium, which is familiarly pleasant to those who have noted the features of a steady snowfall. The homestead stood alone and steadfast, the one fixed object in the wavering waste that was the landscape. A great drift lay athwart the front door; others against the chimneys and in the angles of the roof.

Within, the great parlor was full to the remotest corner of scarlet shine from the riotous yule fire, underpinned with "fat" lightwood knots and roofed with hickory logs. The hexagons of glass in the book-case doors were patens of bright gold; the perpendicular disk of the light-stand shone like a polished shield. The festoons of running cedar and the holly-boughs in the vases seemed astir with dancing shadows. From the ceiling hung a bunch of mistletoe, studded with waxen berries, pulsing visibly in the current of warmed air.

A company of about twenty young people was wound

and knotted in a semicircular ring at a respectful distance from the heart of the glare. This had been a "dining-day" at Summerfield. Two Archers, an Eggleston, a Page, a Craig, two Venables, a Carrington, three Macons, and two of the Burleigh Reads, with the Summerfield residents, made up the party. They would all lodge under our roof that night. If the number of bedrooms in the homestead had been less by half than it was, none of them would have been suffered to depart. Christmas Day, kept this year on Monday, the 26th of December, was the beginning of a series of "junketings" that would overrun the holiday week. On the morrow the throng would break bounds and snow-drifts to swarm down upon Burleigh, the residence of my great-uncle, Lyle Read, by whom the guests would be entertained for a day and a night. On Wednesday they were expected at Hunter's Rest; on Thursday by the Sleepy Creek Venables; on Friday at Fonthill, the ancestral seat of the Archers. These were regular engagements, from which would spring divers impromptu diversions and suggestions for prolongation of the convivialties.

There was no dancing in Presbyterian houses, but the day had gone by merrily. The first carriage drove up at half-past eleven. Dinner was served at two o'clock on two tables running the whole length of the dining-room. Oysters, roast turkeys, wild and domestic; roast pig, duck, mutton and beef, boiled ham, fried chicken, sweet and Irish potatoes, hominy, rice, black-eyed peas, turnips, parsnips, cold-slaw, pickles of every conceivable kind, and no less than twenty dishes of sweets, including mince, lemon, apple and custard-pie, damson puffs, the ever-luscious, transparent pudding, plum pudding, preserves, cakes, jellies and cream—somewhat in this order went the feast. Tiny glasses of home-made

liqueur prefaced it in the parlor, and tumblers of Aunt Betsey's famous egg-nogg went around with the dessert. Just before bed-time she would compound a mighty bowl of the same as a general night-cap. Into this would go:

3 pints of peach brandy,
("Hunter's Rest" brand, smooth as oil, clear as amber, and fifteen years old);
3 gallons of fresh milk,
5 dozen eggs—yolks and whites beaten separately;
1½ lbs. best loaf sugar,
1 nutmeg, grated.

Captain Macon, although compelled to dine at home with his spinster visitors, had ridden over with his sons and daughter purposely to "quaff"—standing, and his hand upon his heart—"a beaker of the incomparable beverage brewed

'By nae hands as ye may guess
Save those of fairlie fair.'"

It was clear that the true-hearted old officer bore his former flame no ungenerous grudge for her unexplained silence almost thirty years ago.

Everybody, including my saintly grandmother, tasted egg-nogg at Christmas. Nobody had taken enough of any kind of stimulant to make him either stupid or over-merry at this the hour when fun and jollity reached the climax. We had music at intervals throughout the afternoon. Aunt Maria's harmonica was a mahogany box about four feet long and as many in width, and eighteen inches deep. A hinged cover, when lifted, revealed rows of hemispherical glasses mounted on footless stems, set in sockets. The vessels were arranged in octaves, the larger representing the base, the smaller the treble keys of a harpsichord. When used, a supernumerary goblet was filled with water, and the finger-tips dipped in this were passed deftly around the rims

of those bearing the names of the desired notes of music. These were the "musical glasses" popular at the period, sets of which may still be found once in a great while in old mansions. The music was a sweet, vibrant legato strain, best adapted for sacred and plaintive airs. Aunt Maria played well and with ease that tempted one to imagine that the dulcet ring following the motion of her hands flowed spontaneously from the slender brown fingers. Mr. Bradley accompanied her on the flute in selections from Moore's "National Airs," a book he had brought from Richmond in September.

Miss Virginia Dabney was a skillful pianist, but in the absence of that instrument was persuaded to sing to a flute second a ballad named by Mr. Bradley. Hand-organs have taken all the music out of the somewhat shallow melody, and parodists achieved their usual *reductio ad absurdum* for the rhymes which were never poetry; but, given in her tender trill and pure articulation, tactful expression supplying soul to the words, it was listened to with feeling, applauded enthusiastically.

I transcribe the song, that the reader may compare the lyrical taste of our grandparents with that which considers the popular English ballad as very weak lemonade, and craves claret-cup and champagne in classic symphony and operatic bravura. Some knowledge of the sentiment conveyed by the words is likewise necessary to a right comprehension of the ensuing conversation:

'A place in thy memory, dearest,
  Is all that I claim,
To pause and look back when thou hearest
  The sound of my name.
Another may woo thee nearer,
  Another may win and may wear;
I care not if he be dearer
  So I 'm remembered there.

"Remember me not as a lover,
  Whose hopes have been crossed,
Whose bosom can never recover
  The joy it has lost.
As a young bride remembers the mother
  She loves, yet ne'er more may see;
As a sister remembers a brother,
  So, dearest, remember me!

"Remember me, then—and remember
  My calm life, love;
Though drear as the skies of November
  Its light may prove,
That life will, though lonely, be sweet
  If its brightest enjoyment should be
A smile and a kind word when we meet,
  And a place in thy memory."

It was encored by acclamation. The songstress was very lovely in her compliance with the flattering request. Crouched on my sheepskin cushion between the sweep of her pale-blue silk skirt and the wall, I watched her in rapt content. Mr. Bradley stood behind her with his flute at lip. For once Uncle Archie had established himself in the chair next to hers. By leaning back and turning slightly to the left he could look down upon her without seeming intentness of observation. That she was conscious of his gaze I was certain when I marked the heightened damask stealing upward to her forehead as she sang again, and yet more sweetly than at first, the soft contralto of the flute sustaining and enriching the poor little air, with its one imperfectly-hinted musical thought.

"Too disinterested by half!"

The speaker was Roderick Macon. He had borrowed a banjo from "the quarters," and began to screw up the strings while he talked, standing on the outskirt of the semicircle, very tall, black and restless as to wall-shadow.

"'If she be not fair for me,
  What care I how fair she be?'

The fellow whose highest hope of terrestrial happiness is that the woman who has discarded him may not entirely forget the insignificant fact of his existence, ought to be toned up on milk punch, wine whey and chalybeate bitters. His blood is thin, his brain inert, his gastric juices vitiated."

There was a laugh, for handsome Roderick was a medical student.

"Rod has just reached Dietetics. You must excuse the bent of his ideas," interpolated his sister, in affected mortification. "Now, I should recommend a Spanish fly blister for that unambitious youth, to be applied at the base of the brain. Just to wake him up, you know. Love couldn't do it, it seems."

"It is well that I am not responsible for the sentiment of my song," said Miss Virginia, smiling. "Yet —I suppose you will be ashamed of me as a fellow-woman, Harry, and it is impolitic to confess as much in the hearing of the gentlemen"—blushing bewitchingly—"but I really do think that if I were a man I could sympathize with the feelings of that author. Being a woman, I could honor him for it."

"He may certainly claim the blessing promised to the poor in spirit," observed Branch Archer. "It is lucky he is content to wait for it, since his chances of temporal reward are worse than uncertain."

There was a hum of eager assent and demur from the masculine group that, by a natural law of accretion, always encompassed Harry Macon.

"I believe there are men, neither mean-spirited nor sickly, who could feel what the song expresses." Uncle Archie's strong tones took up the discussion. "The difficulty is that love is seldom so single-hearted as that. The first object is apt to be a man's own happiness, and the second that of the woman he loves. As I look at the

case of this discarded suitor, if he had loved her less, he would not have had the courage to give her up. If he had been less sensible, he would have persecuted her until she was disgusted, instead of cherishing his memory as that of the friend who would rather be her brother than the husband of any other woman. There is a great deal that passes for love which is clear selfishness, and for the pain of disappointed affection which is nothing but mortified vanity."

The murmur of criticism and opinion broke out anew. Under cover of it Miss Virginia spoke softly to the companion nearest her.

"Thank you! I thought you would understand!"

A delicately inflected emphasis on the pronoun in the second person made the acknowledgment the more valuable to him who bent to catch it. His eye beamed, the vein in his forehead throbbed. Before he could speak, Roderick Macon swung the banjo aloft in a strummed prelude; his full baritone interrupted the strife of tongues:

"Says the blackbird to the crow,
'What makes white folks hate us so?
Ever since the first Old Adam was born
It 's been our trade to pull up corn,
Caw! caw! caw!'

"'Oh!' says the nightingale, sitting in the grass,
'Once I loved a handsome lass;
But, though my voice would charm a king,
She wouldn't so much as let me sing.'"

(An excellent imitation of the unwriteable "jug-jug-jug!" of the nightingale.)

"'Ah!' says the woodpecker, drumming on a tree,
'Once I wooed a fair ladye;
She grew fickle, and from me fled;
Ever since then my head 's been red.'"

"Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap!" (with the finger on the wood of the banjo).

"'To-whoo!' cries the owl with head so white,
All alone on a dark, rainy night,
'Oft I hear the young men say,
"Court by night and sleep by day!"
To-whit! To-whoo!'"

His sister caught the instrument in the concluding flourish, picked at the strings with a touch as practiced as his, in a rollicking melody. Somebody said once that "the banjo laughed whenever she touched it."

"If you want practical, hard common sense, here it is," she said, without breaking the tune:

"Whistle, daughter! whistle! come, now, be very good!"
"I cannot whistle, mother. You know I never could."

"Whistle, daughter! whistle! and have these lovely flowers!"
"I cannot whistle, mother, though I should try for hours."

"Whistle, daughter! whistle! behold a golden ring!"
"I cannot whistle, mother! I ne'er did such a thing!"

"Whistle, daughter! whistle! and be in satin dressed!"
"I cannot whistle, mother, or I would do my best."

"Whistle, daughter! whistle! and you shall have a man!"
"*Whew-ew-ew! whew-ew-ew! whew-ew-ew! I'll do it if I can!*"

Unmoved by the clapping and laughter succeeding the last line, she whistled the air through clearly and correctly, to a dashing banjo accompaniment.

"That shows what motive will accomplish!" she uttered, passing the instrument backward over her head to her brother.

She was a dazzling picture—sitting there on a low stool in the very focus of warm color, and thrown into striking relief by the line of dark-coated men behind her. Her gown of canton crape was of a rich cream in tint, and left to view the perfectly-moulded shoulders and arms. A scarlet scarf was disposed in artistic negligence over one shoulder and caught in a loose knot

under the other. Beneath her skirt peeped out the toe of a high-heeled slipper and a red rosette. Her luxuriant hair was combed over a cushion *à la Pompadour*, and wound into close bands on the nape of the neck. Half the men in the room would have been ready at that instant to swear that they adored her. She knew this, and was used to it. She had expanded into glorious bloom in an atmosphere of adulation that would have been death to generous impulse in a less fine nature. If she offended prudes by her avowed fondness for flirtation, and the liking for escapades that sometimes grazed the proprieties, she won comrades to loyalty and lenient elders to indulgence of her most questionable freaks. Even her brother Sidney admitted that "Harry was capable of managing her own affairs." The boldest admirer would not have dared to cross the line she drew sharply between freedom and license. Uncle Archie cast a look of affectionate admiration at her now, laughed with the rest at the latest ebullition of unconquerable levity. He had liked and petted her ever since, as a baby-despot, she would ride on no shoulder but his when her mother brought her for the day or afternoon to Summerfield.

The stiff-backed, claw-footed settees had been walked away from the wall for the convenience of those who would surround the fire. Perched on the arm of one of these, one foot touching the floor, Roderick Macon sang and strummed comic and sentimental songs upon call, until Harry captured the banjo, declaring that she was tired to death of his croaking.

"So is everybody else, but nobody except your faithful sister is enough your friend to tell you so. Mr. Craig cracked his jaws on a particularly tough yawn just now. Don't deny it, Mr. Craig! I am so used to the sound that I recognize the gulp of a swallowed yawn on the

instant. I have a delightful bit of news for you all, friends. Listen!" smiling around the ring that looked as well as listened. "It is just the day and the hour and the weather for—GHOST STORIES! We will have nothing else until supper-time, and never a lamp or candle in the room. It used to be the custom at family Christmas parties for people to get around the fire in the evening, each with a vacant chair beside him or her, and talk of spirits until they *appeared*—and sat down with them!" This in a sepulchral tone, her eyes dilated upon vacancy.

A stifled shriek from a nervous young woman and a universal shudder.

"That was carrying a pleasant custom rather too far for good taste," Harry subjoined, considerate of the whims of weaker natures. "But it is only right and fit—a duty we owe to Christmas, ourselves and the company of shades—to spend the twilight of this day in telling true stories of what is vulgarly termed 'the supernatural'—when it is truly more natural than nature herself! I believe firmly in ghosts. I am neither ashamed nor afraid to confess it. So does every minister I ever forced to speak frankly of the matter, and I have tried dozens. 'It is not a subject to be treated lightly,' they say. 'Hem—em! Such beliefs are prone to degenerate into superstition if the ignorant are allowed to—ah—hem!—embrace them.'"

"Harry!" remonstrated Sidney, yet unable to seem quite grave. "You forget yourself!"

Her imitation of Mr. Burgess was perfect.

"The last person I shall forget while reason reigns, my dear brother! But to leave ghostly fathers and go back to our more interesting ghosts. My father believes in them, fully and solemnly. I think nobody here will doubt *his* sense and courage!" drawing herself up

proudly. "I wrung the confession from him one night last winter, when he and I had the house to ourselves, and the maddest, gloriousest storm was howling outside. He has seen—THINGS—himself. But not so many as—here is a part of my surprise for you—as Mrs. Waddell! Aunt Betsey is a born ghost-seer!"

I detected a swift exchange of glances between Aunt Maria and Uncle Archie. Then the latter spoke lightly:

"Who is to be responsible for the mischief these revelations may do, Miss Harry? Will you sit up to-night with sal-volatile and burnt feathers, to wait upon all the young ladies you frighten out of their wits?"

"The truth is only—hem-em!—perilous to the feeble-minded, my young friend. To the—ah!—enlightened and rational, accustomed to—ah, hem!—weigh evidence, may be safely intrusted the keeping of—hem-em-hem!—mysteries, the key to which we do not at the present possess, Mr. Read!"

"Harry! Harry!" from Sidney, now really uneasy.

She went on audaciously.

"We will try this intelligent company by a Scriptural test. 'Whosoever is fearful and afraid let him depart and return early'—that is *now*, to the Mount Gilead of the dining-room, where the staid and elderly are enjoying unlimited pipes and housekeeping gossip. We who are bold and rational enough to hear the truth will stay here, send an embassage to Mrs. Waddell, and when she comes, coax out of her all she knows. While I count ten the flight may begin."

Of course, nobody moved. Miss Virginia cast a side-long look at me. I squeezed her hand imploringly.

"Please, *please* let me stay," I whispered.

For answer she made a gesture that bade me crouch more closely to her side for better concealment. Snuggled up under her wing, I possessed myself of one of

her arms, kissed it, and laid my cheek against the satin-soft skin in dumb ecstacy.

Mr. Bradley was deputed to entreat Aunt Betsey's presence, her partiality for the handsome tutor being no secret. In his absence Miss Harry continued her discourse, her chin in her palm, elbow on knee, her great eyes like lamps with reflected fire-shine.

"Yes! I believe in apparitions and wraiths and guardian angels and omens and presentiments—and especially in dreams. Many of my dreams come true. The reason most people dream to no effect is that they pay no attention to the visions of the night. The spirits that whisper them to us are repelled by their indifference. I write mine down with the date, always. I had an *awful* one last night!"

She gave a shiver that seemed real. An instant demand for the narration of the vision arose from all sides.

"It will not amuse you, good people! I told it at the breakfast-table. The maiden aunts said it was a warning, and advised me to 'stay at home and lay it to heart,' and poor Di nearly fainted. Papa says it grew out of the sermon yesterday. He scolded me for telling it in the hearing of the servants. They have such inflammable imaginations! I thought I was standing on a hill-top at the dead of night— But perhaps some of *you* have combustible imaginations?" checking herself abruptly.

There was a clamorous asseveration to the contrary. Miss Virginia doubtless had no fears respecting the effect of dreams or ghost stories upon a child brought up so sensibly as I had been, and whose association was almost entirely with her elders. I should have known, too, that Harry Macon was such a madcap that people never attached much importance to her vagaries. But

I shall carry the memory of vision and ghostly tale until reason and recollection give way together.

Harry took up the thread of the relation, gazing into the fire, and, as she proceeded, apparently oblivious of present scene and auditors, her tones sinking into a musical monotone, as in dreamy soliloquy.

"I was standing on a hill-top at the dead of night. The sky was full of stars, and the Northern lights were shooting up from the horizon. I was alone, but not lonely or timid. Presently I made out that the hill was that on which the Bienvenu house used to stand. I could see the roof of Old Singinsville, and the creek winding through the low-grounds and the river on my right hand, both shining like glass as the Northern lights streamed higher and higher. Then other lights began to gleam in the south, east and west, long spears and lances of white flame mounting up, up, up, until they covered the heavens and met at the zenith. There they formed a big, luminous cross, shedding rays in every direction—a blazing cross, raining white light down the sides of the firmament clear to the earth. Everything was as bright as day—and brighter. I could count the stones in the graveyard and the blades of corn in the low-grounds. Still everything was as still as death, and I was all alone, and did not feel afraid. I wished for Papa, and that Di were not so much afraid of the night air, and smiled to think how Rod and Sid would explain it all upon natural principles when I should tell them about it to-morrow.

"Suddenly a crimson glow quivered up from the north and spread fast, streaming upward and around until the heavens were as red as blood, flickering and throbbing just as the bed of coals there does. As the glow reached the cross, that began to change shape, until, before I could feel surprised, an immense bell

hung where the white cross had been—a crimson bell, and in it a mighty clapper, like a burning coal. There were fiery letters on the outside of the bell running around the edge. They made a single word—'DOOM!'"

"Harry Macon!" Sally Page cried out, a sick tremor shaking the roses from her cheeks, "I think it is wicked to dream such things, and as sinful to repeat them!"

"I advised you to go to Mount Gilead," retorted the narrator. "I told you all that inflammable imaginations weren't safe when there was fire around. There is worse coming. I 'll wait until you have gone into the other room."

It was impossible not to laugh when Sally protested that she "would not budge a step. She was as brave as other people. But she was thankful *she* never had such horrid dreams. She knew she should die of fright before she woke up."

"Very likely," rejoined Harry. "I am not easily frightened, even in my sleep. I stood staring up at the monstrous bell, wishing more than ever that Papa and the boys were there to see it, and wondering what the inscription meant. Still there was no one on the hill but me, and I was not at all afraid.

"'DOOM!' said I aloud. 'To whom, I wonder!'

"At that second the clapper vibrated and the bell began to *toll!* The boom shook heaven and earth. It rings in my ears now. Instantly the hill-top and sides and the low-grounds were crowded with people, and, looking around, I saw other hills, miles away, packed with faces, all gazing up at the great crimson bell, and trembling at the deafening strokes. In the graveyard by the church the stones were heaving and the ground opening, and forms were rising in white shrouds to join the multitude. Still no one uttered a sound. There was nothing to be heard but that slow 'toll! toll! toll!'

It was strange, but I was not terrified, and saw nobody I knew.

"In the twinkling of an eye a man started up above the heads of the people. I saw it was Mr. Dudley. His shout rang out like a trumpet—was heard above the bell:

"'*It is the great and terrible day of the Lord! Cry unto Zion that her warfare is accomplished! Come out of Babylon, my people, until these calamities be overpast!*'

"By the time the words were spoken the bell and the glow and the stars went out, all at once, and I was hurrying along over the deep sand of a desert with Papa and Di, trying to make our way to the sea. We were escaping from the persecution of Christians set on foot by the Man of Sin spoken of in the Bible. Wherever we turned we saw stakes and fires and martyrs burning. The sea-shore was lined with them—the hills were lighted by them. We could smell the pitch in which the fagots were dipped. We walked and walked, our feet sinking in hot sand. Di was tired out, and Papa picked her up and carried her. Poor Papa! red coat and all! And I carried his cane. The top was made in the shape of a cross, and he charged me not to lose it. Once I hid it behind a sand-heap, but he sent me back for it, and made me hold it up high as we walked, that we might 'add our testimony to the truth of Christianity.'

"'We will not make our escape from torture and death under false pretenses!' he said.

"Wasn't that just like the dear, stanch old Christian soldier?"

She laughed softly and was silent, still gazing into the intense depths of the fire. The blaze rushed up the chimney-throat with the blast of forge-flames. The white whirl outside of the windows was ashy-gray; the

wind howled and sobbed, with now and then a shriller cry as of sudden pain or remembered anguish. For a whole minute nothing was said. Then Sally Page moved impatiently.

"Well? What then? Go on!"

Harry did not withdraw her eyes from the scarlet coals.

"That is all!" she answered abstractedly. "There is nothing more."

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly! Did you ever hear of a wound-up, rounded-off and finished dream? They always end in the middle and unsatisfactorily. Like some lives!"

As the door opened she sprang up, all mischief and animation, and ran to seize and secure the seeress.

"We thought you were never coming!" she pouted at Mr. Bradley.

"I had to use craft to get her at all," was his defense. "She was begirt with admirers three deep."

There was a flush on Aunt Betsey's face that on a less benignant visage might have been read as gratified vanity, a gleam like triumph in her eyes. At dinner she had been calm, but attent upon the business of the hour, fine breeding and the wisdom of experience combining to suppress outward evidence of solicitude as to the successful movement of the repast. Supper was a bagatelle that rested like a feather on the lake of hospitable design. For the rest of the day she had but to enjoy and be enjoyed.

Harry led her in stately progress to the biggest armchair, set a stool beneath the trim feet encased in prunella slippers, threw both arms about her neck and kissed her.

"Now!" subsiding into an enchanting mass of creamy crape, scarlet scarf and winsome smiles upon

a foot-cushion before her—"you are going to be an angel and tell us all—taking as long a time as you can, because it is Christmas, and nobody else ever did, ever does or ever can tell such Christmas tales as you—all about the Trueheart Ghost—the one you and Papa saw!"

It is needless to say that Aunt Betsey demurred, hesitated, wavered, in just accordance with conventionalism and expectation. Almost as superfluous to state that the several stages of reluctance were in time overcome by argument and coaxing. It may not be amiss to mention that she had, from the outset, the secret intention to yield in the end. Story-telling was her passion, and she was (modestly) conscious of her aptitude in the art. On an ordinary occasion she would have succumbed out of hand at Harry Macon's hug and kiss. The Trueheart Ghost was a different affair. She had been choice of repeating it of late years, and in earlier days there were reasons why the history should be made known to few. But for Captain Macon's concession to his favorite daughter's entreaties in their *tête-à-tête* talk on the night of the "maddest, gloriousest storm," the chances are that the witch would never have had an inkling of the existence of the mystery. If the *raconteur* had lived in this day she might have pleaded that the natural emotion consequent upon the narration, the inevitable return in some measure, of the excitement of the events she recalled, would draw so heavily upon nervous forces, involve so rapid a waste of cellular tissue, that it was not safe to repeat it too often or abruptly.

Aunt Betsey liked attention, and to have her tales made much of. Her professional eye appreciated the possibilities of the present situation. Christmas night; a circle of enthusiastic *young* listeners; firelight and

"the tumultuous privacy of storm;" herself the only elderly person importuned, or even invited to contribute to the enjoyment of the gay party! Quibble and protest and disclaimer were meet prefatory ceremonies, like undoing the clasps, opening the volume and clearing one's throat before beginning what everybody was dying to hear. To this commingling of motives and emotion we were indebted for the true and authentic account of THE TRUEHEART GHOST.

CHAPTER XI.

"MADAM TRUEHEART, as she was generally called, was Tom Trueheart's great aunt-in-law," began the blessed woman, careful and conscientious of genealogical degrees. "She was a widow when she married Colonel Trueheart. She was a cousin of my mother, and showed her French extraction very distinctly, having black eyes and hair and a clear brunette complexion. Her features were fine and distinguished, and her carriage was a model of dignity and grace. Some thought her haughty as a girl. As she grew older she was reserved and grave. After the death of her husband and the loss, one after another, of four children, she was rarely seen to smile. Colonel Trueheart was a jolly, loud-talking, loud-laughing, fox-hunting 'squire of the old English school. His wife had been dead a year when he paid a visit to Mrs. Bland's (her first husband was a Bland) brother, in Amelia County; fell violently in love with her, and gave her no peace until she married him. He had three sons, all settled in homes of their own, so his residence, Selma, about half a mile beyond the city of Richmond, was left to

these two. It was a beautiful place, and had a large plantation attached to it. The Colonel lived like a lord —plenty of servants, blooded horses, a pack of hounds, a cellar of choice wines, and a houseful of company the year around. His table was celebrated as one of the best in the state.

"I recollect"—laughing—"that Uncle Windsor, then our carriage-driver, remarked once to 'Ritta, in my sister Judith's hearing, 'Colonel Trueheart's 'stablishment allers fotches to my min' de story of dat rich man in de Scripters, whar fared presumptuously every day. 'Pears like tain't fyar to have all dat, and Heaben too.'

"If the Colonel had any such scruples he kept them so close that nobody guessed at them. He got louder in talk and redder in the face; ate and drank more, and hunted harder every year, his wife all the time growing paler and quieter. It was said she got out of the habit of talking through spending so much time alone, for the Colonel was very little at home, except when his dining days and game and oyster suppers were on hand. Sometimes he would be away for two or three weeks, junketing in the houses of his country friends, and Madam Trueheart gradually fell into a way of remaining behind at Selma. It was said she was not in strong health, and had no relish for gay society. For all that, the Colonel was very fond and proud of her, and was never heard to speak unkindly to her. It was asserted, too, by those who knew them well, that he never swore in her presence, but I cannot vouch for that.

"I was very young when I paid my first visit there, but I remember how shocked I was at his free-and-easy manners, and how odd it was to see him dip his own spoon or fork into the dishes nearest to him while he was telling hunting and fighting stories, and Madam Trueheart, in her black satin or velvet—she never wore

colors—and rich laces, sat up straight and handsome at the head of the table, scarcely speaking unless when some one asked a question. She read a great deal and wrote much, generally at night, sitting up very late at her secretary, writing for hours and hours. Her desk was full of manuscripts—so said those who had chanced to see it open during her lifetime. When she died it was empty. She had burned every page, even the letters she had received.

"The Colonel went first, ten years before her, and, as everybody had predicted, was carried off by apoplexy. He never spoke after the stroke. He was fifty when he married Mrs. Bland, sixty when he died. The homestead was left to her during her lifetime, with enough to keep it up well, upon condition that she continued to occupy it. At her death this was to go to his sons. Her thirds were hers in fee-simple in any event. It was considered a very handsome provision for her. She was executrix and administratrix. The Colonel had a high opinion of her business abilities.

"Five or six years after his death I went to Richmond to visit my friends, the Pleasantses. Madam Trueheart drove into town to see me as soon as she heard I was there, and invited Betty Lyle (who was with me at the Pleasantses') and myself to spend a week at Selma. We accepted, and the day was set for her to send for us. But Betty was called home by her mother's sickness, and I had to go alone. The house was of brick and large, with a deep hall running throughout the entire depth. At the right of this as you entered was a great drawing-room, with windows at the front and side. Behind this was 'the chamber' where Madam sat by day and slept by night; back of it, storeroom and linen-closets. On the other side of the hall was a sort of ante-room, a cross-passage, out of which

the staircase ran up to the second floor. An arch, filled with a Venetian-blind door, separated this from the main hall, and another archway, just like it, divided the front hall from the back. Next to the ante-chamber was the dining-room; back of it a smaller apartment, which I was to occupy. The library was in a wing, jutting out at the rear of my bedroom.

"'I meant to put you and your friend in the chamber over mine,' said Madam. 'But you might be lonely there.'

"I told her that I was not timid, yet that I should rather be near her in case of sickness or any such thing, and thanked her for her thoughtfulness. I always liked and admired Madam Trueheart, and, although I was not bold enough to tell her so, I suspect that she had found it out. Her steady black eyes saw far into character and motives. She was very kind to me all that evening, really exerting herself to talk, and listening, as if she enjoyed it, to my account of the parties I had attended in Richmond and to stories of my home-life. After supper she played for me on the spinnet in the parlor, a fine instrument, for which the Colonel had sent to England in the lifetime of his first wife. Then she took me into the library.

"'I remember how fond you were of reading as a child, and how well you read aloud,' she was pleased to say. 'Do you still like it well enough to let me enjoy one of these with you to-night?'

"I was delighted, of course. New books were a rarity to a country girl, and she had the 'Mysteries of Udolpho' and the 'Children of the Abbey' and several others I had never seen before. I chose Mrs. Inchbald's 'Simple Story,' and carried it with me into the chamber. Madam sat upright in her chair at one corner of the fireplace making knotted curtain-fringe

while I read. It impressed me sadly that evening to fancy how many nights she must have sat just there, with no company but the lamp and the fire. I wondered, as I had often heard others do, that she could be willing to lead such a solitary life. The Pleasantses had spoken of her invitation to me as a high compliment, since she hardly ever had even a grandchild pass the night with her. But she was particularly fond of my mother, the two having been reared more like sisters than cousins. At ten o'clock she made me put by my book and eat a sugar-cake and drink a glass of wine—'to coax sound sleep,' she said.

"'I do not need it for that purpose,' answered I. 'It is very unusual for me to awake from the moment my head touches the pillow until morning.'

"'That is young people's sleep,' she said, half-sighing. 'I will go with you to your room, and see that you are comfortable for the night.'

"She had not told me to bring my maid, and one of hers had waited on me when I arrived that day. This woman was in my bedroom now. Madam dismissed her when she had seen that fire, water and towels were all right. I recalled then, as one of the peculiarities I had heard spoken of, that she never let a servant stay in the house over night. An immense Newfoundland dog slept on the hearth-rug in the chamber, and in the day patroled the premises. Madam may have been eccentric in some respects, but she was all goodness to me, sitting by my fire while I combed my hair, and talking pleasantly of my mother and old times until it was time to say 'Good night.' Then she kissed me, and told me not to forget how near she was to me should I awake in the night. The rain had begun to fall quite heavily, and the patter on the porch-roof soon put me to sleep. I did not open my eyes or stir until morning."

"No ghost that night!" ejaculated Harry, in resentful chagrin.

"No, nor on the next. A November storm had set in, and lasted two days. I was not homesick or low-spirited. In the library were many interesting books new to me. I was fond of fancy work, and Madam taught me two or three lovely stitches, gave me cotton, and showed me how to begin a set of fringes as a gift for my mother. She proved a delightful companion, and *that* was a surprise. She was well-read in English literature, had seen much of the world, and thought deeply. We finished 'A Simple Story' on the third night by nine o'clock, and sat for nearly an hour talking it over cheerfully. Then I ate an apple instead of drinking the wine she offered—a big, dark-red wine-sap—at which she said something about my preferring to take my *liqueur* in that form, and I laughed. I mention these trifles to show that my brain was not excited by talk or stimulant. I never felt better or brighter than when I lighted my candle to go to my room. Rosina, the servant who waited on me, had gone to bed early with a headache.

"'I will see that all is in order in your chamber,' said Madam, putting up her work.

"'Please don't stir,' I begged. 'I am surely sufficiently at home to look after myself a little,' and off I went.

"My wax candle gave an excellent light, and I carried it before me. In closing the door of Madam's bedroom I faced that of mine just across the passage. This was narrower than the square front hall, being not more than six feet wide, and shut off from that, as I have said, by Venetian blinds. These I had seen Madam bolt at the same time that I locked the back door at the other end of the passage, after Rosina went

out soon after supper. Just as I shut the chamber door behind me, a little woman started right out of the opposite door, glided slowly along the wall, her head bowed upon her hands—in this way—crouching as she went, and vanished at the green blinds.

"'Who was that?' thought I, catching my breath. 'Probably one of the servants who had fallen asleep in my room, and slipped out of sight when she heard me coming. She moved like a cat.' Then, like a flash of lightning—'How did she get through the blinds without unbolting them?' Lastly—'She did not open my door —*only came out of it!*'

"We come of a brave race, and I had always prided myself upon being afraid of nothing. My father had trained us to hold ghost stories in profound contempt. I had never had a thrill of superstitious dread in my life; yet I staggered back into Madam's room, white as a shroud, set down the candle I was too weak to hold, and said:

"'I have seen a ghost!'

"Madam was as pale as I—stood up, straight and rigid.

"'Child! what do you say?'

"'If there is such a thing as a ghost, I have seen one!'

"Without a word she picked up my candle and walked into the hall. I heard her try blinds and back door, go into my room and examine the fastenings of my windows. When she came back she poured out a glass of wine and made me drink it, looking so set and stern that I was afraid she did not believe me.

"'Indeed, ma'am,' I said, sick and trembling, and stammering on every word, 'I am sorry I startled you—very much ashamed to seem so foolish! But I *did* see something! Quite near to me—so close I could almost have touched it!'

"'I do not doubt it, child. What was it?'

"'A small woman, dressed in some sort of grayish-yellow gown. Her head was bent low, so that I could not see her face. She seemed to shrink away from me as she slipped along close to the wall. She disappeared at the blinds. But they did not open; nor my door, to let her out!'

"I began to shake again.

"'Do not try to talk, my dear!' (She had never called me so before.) 'You shall sleep with me to-night,' said Madam, soothingly. 'To-morrow, if you wish it, you shall go back to town.'

"Not another syllable would she let me speak about the fright. She went to my room with me to get what I needed for that night and next morning, for which I was infinitely obliged to her. I could not forget that IT had come out of that chamber, and I dared not glance over my shoulder.

"By daylight I was braver and disposed to question the evidence of my own eyes. What could I say if I returned to the Pleasantses so soon? That I had been scared away by an apparition? They would never get done teasing me about it. That I was 'blue,' and had had a stupid visit? when Madam had done her best to make me happy!

"After breakfast, in the chamber into which the sun shone clearly after the storm, the fire blazing merrily, and Carlo asleep on the hottest part of the rug, flowers in the windows and Madam busy with her knotting—with everything looking natural and everyday-like and inviting, even to the novel I meant to begin that morning—I made up my mind. I told Madam that I preferred to remain a few days longer with her if she would allow it. What I had seen might have been an optical illusion—a trick of my brain, caused by too much read-

ing and too little exercise. I wished her to forget it, and to let things go on as before. And I was having a *delightful* visit.

"She was gratified and touched. I could see that. Still she assured me that she would not be hurt or offended if I went away now. She only stipulated that I should tell nobody why I did not finish my visit.

"'I should be extremely sorry were the house to get the reputation of being haunted,' she remarked. 'It is property left to me in trust for Colonel Trueheart's children and grandchildren. If this story were to get abroad it would lower the value of it seriously. It would be hard to dispose of it at any price. I say this frankly to you, for you are a sensible girl.'

"After that she could not have driven me away. I said so, and the matter was put aside. We had another busy, quiet day, varied by a drive into town and a little shopping. That night I stayed again in her chamber, resting well and seeing and hearing nothing unusual. The next evening, just before supper-time, we were agreeably surprised by a visit from Captain Macon. He had come to town on business—"

"Of vital importance!" Thus Harry Macon, parenthetical and saucy.

Aunt Betsey nipped her ear and continued undauntedly:

"On *business!* to arrange about the sale of his tobacco! Of course he desired to pay his respects to Madam Trueheart, whom he had known always. She had his horse taken around to the stables, and urged him to stay to supper, which he consented to do. At ten o'clock he got up to go. We were sitting in the drawing-room. Madam had a slight cold and had excused herself an hour or two earlier, saying that she felt the change in the temperature very sensibly, her

"THE THING CAME DOWN VERY SLOWLY, STEP BY STEP, MAKING NO NOISE AS IT MOVED."—p. 179.

chamber being warmer than this large parlor. She thought it prudent to go back to her own fireside."

"Considerate, delightful old lady!" murmured the incorrigible.

"At ten o'clock, as I said," pursued the narrator, "he arose to go, and I went with him to the parlor-door.

"'Why, the hall is all dark!' I exclaimed.

"It was usually lighted by three wax candles in a chandelier hanging from the ceiling. We supposed, in talking of it afterward, that they must have been blown out by a gust of wind from the back door when the servants left the house for the night. The door of the drawing-room had a way of swinging to of itself, and as I passed the threshold it shut behind us. Our eyes were naturally drawn, in the absence of other light, to a window directly opposite. The shutters of this were open, and the moonbeams streamed in. I have described the sort of ante-chamber at the left of the front hall. Through the archway connecting the two we had a full view of the staircase. It was broad, and had two landings. On the lower was the moonlit window, opening down to the floor. Somebody was descending the stairs between the upper and lower landings. A small figure, all in white, a gown that trailed on the steps behind her, and over her head something like a long bridal veil.

"I caught Captain Macon's arm, too terrified to utter a word. It did not occur to him that there was anything supernatural in the appearance, but imagining that I meant him to be quiet, he stood perfectly still with me in the recess made by the closed parlor door. The Thing came down very slowly, step by step, making no noise as it moved; crossed the flood of moonlight, turned on the landing and glided down the four remaining steps, its back to the window, and, therefore,

facing us. It was within ten feet of us when Madam Trueheart's voice was heard from the back hall.

"'Did I hear you say that the lights are out, Betsey?' she called.

The Creature—whatever It was—disappeared instantly! It did not run away or sink into the floor or rise into the air, but simply was *not!* The place where it had stood a second before was empty, and we had not moved our eyes from it."

A long, shuddering sigh was exhaled from a dozen pair of lungs, as she made at this point a rhetorical pause. Mr. Bradley stealthily stirred the coals under the forestick to heighten the illumination of the room.

"Go on!" said Harry, in a deep, awed voice. "It would kill us were you to trifle with our curiosity now!"

"I have no disposition to trifle with you, my dear, or to speak lightly of any part of a strange, true story—one which was very distressing at the time. Why I neither fainted nor went into hysterics I do not know, unless that I never was in the habit of doing either. Captain Macon complimented me on my nerve. Madam expressed her thankfulness that the shock had not been a serious injury to me. She was cool and collected through it all. At Captain Macon's earnest request, she let him take a light and examine every part of the house. Besides ourselves not a human being was in it. Madam Trueheart led the way into her chamber when the search was over.

"'May I ask of you, as a great favor, to spend the night in this house?' she said to our guest.

"He bowed. 'I am honored by the invitation, Madam, and accept it with pleasure.'

"She knew him too well, you see, to inquire if he would be unwilling to stay. He was never afraid of the living or the dead. If she had not proposed it he would

have asked the privilege of remaining. When I could speak without a break in my voice, and laugh at Captain Macon's praises of my self-control, Madam did a singular thing (for her), yet it was the most sensible step she could have taken. She took us into her confidence.

"'It was within six months after I came to Selma to live that I had the first intimation that all was not right with the house,' she said. 'Colonel Trueheart was not at home, and I had gone to bed rather early one night, leaving the fire burning as brightly as it does now. I was not drowsy, but the firelight was too strong to be comfortable to my eyes, and I shut them, lying quietly at ease among the pillows, my thoughts busy and far away. There was no sound except the crackling of the blaze, but suddenly I felt the pressure of two hands on the bed-clothes covering my feet. They rested there for a moment, were lifted and laid upon my ankles, moving regularly upward until I felt them lie more heavily on my chest. I was sure that a robber had found his way into the house and wanted to convince himself that I was really asleep before beginning to plunder. My one hope of life was to remain perfectly still, to breathe easily, and keep my eyes shut. This I did, the sense of hearing made more acute by intense excitement, but my reason singularly steady. When the hands reached my chest Something looked close into my face. There was no breath or audible movement, but I *felt* the gaze. Then the pressure was removed—the Presence was gone! I lay still until I counted deliberately fifty, to assure myself that I was in full possession of my senses, and sat up. The fire showed every object distinctly. I was alone in the chamber. I arose, looked under the bed and in the wardrobe, but found nobody. The windows and shutters were bolted fast,

the door was locked. Yet, so strong was my persuasion that the visitation was not a trick of the imagination that I sat up for the rest of the night, keeping fire and candle burning.

"'When Colonel Trueheart returned I told him what had happened. He laughed heartily, and "hoped the like might occur when he was at home." Three months later I felt the same pressure in the same order of movement. It was on a warm night in spring, and through the lighter coverings I fancied I could discern that the hands were small, the fingers slight, like those of a child or a little woman. I tried to call the Colonel, but could not speak until the Presence had stooped, as before, to look in my face and departed. Colonel Trueheart awoke at my voice, was greatly amazed at what I told him, and insisted upon making just such a tour of the house as you have just instituted, Captain Macon. This over, he tried to convince me that I had been dreaming, or that the sensation was caused by some obstruction of circulation. I did not argue the point, but when, some weeks afterward, I had a similar experience, asked him seriously if he had ever heard that any one else was disturbed in this way. He hesitated, tried to put me off, and finally owned that his first wife had declared to him privately her belief that the house was haunted. That she complained of hearing unaccountable noises at night; that Things passed and touched her in the halls after dark; and once in the daytime, when she was sitting alone in her room, Something had plucked her by the elbow with such force as almost to pull her from her chair. She was delicate and nervous, and he had attached no importance to her fancies.

"'"If sickly women and superstitious negroes are to

be believed, half the country-houses in Virginia are haunted," he said.

"'He cautioned me to say nothing on the subject, else "there would be no such thing as keeping a servant on the premises, and the house would not sell for the worth of the bricks should it ever come into the market."

"'Two years went by without farther disturbance. Then it came in a different form. One night, as I was locking the back door, holding a candle in my left hand, I heard a slight sound, like a sigh or long breath, and, looking up, saw a woman moving past and away from me, just as Betsey has described. She was dressed in a misty yellow-gray or grayish-yellow gown, as Betsey saw her, but with a white handkerchief or cap on her head. I had time to notice that she was small of stature, and that she glided along noiselessly. At the closed Venetian blinds she vanished. Colonel Trueheart entered the front door the next instant, and I made known to him what I had witnessed. He ridiculed the theory that it was supernatural, evidently suspecting some malicious or mischievous prank on the part of one of the servants. After a second thorough search of the house, he loaded his pistols and put them under his pillow, "to be ready," he said, "for the next scare." He always slept with them under his head afterward.

"'Again, for months, nothing unusual occurred. Then the pressure of the hands became frequent. From that time up to the night preceding Colonel Trueheart's death scarcely a fortnight elapsed without my feeling them. Always beginning at my feet—always ending at my chest; always that long *felt* gaze into my face, then It was gone! Sometimes I strained my eyes in the darkness to catch some outline or shadow; again and

again I opened them abruptly in the firelight or moonlight to surprise whatever it might be into revealing Itself. I never beheld face or shape or any visible token of living thing. Once I succeeded in arousing the Colonel at the first touch upon my feet. He struck a light immediately, but although the regular movement continued up to the fixed gaze, the room was apparently free of everybody but ourselves. We had a long consultation then. I was hurt and angry that he remained skeptical as to the reality of the visitations. When all my assertions failed to convince him that I was not the victim of a nervous hallucination, I said:

"'"I shall never allude to this subject again, whatever I may see or hear."

"'"I hope you will keep your word," he replied.

"'Neither of us ever mentioned the matter again to one another. Sometimes, when my pallor or heavy eyes told that I had not slept well, he would look at me anxiously, as if longing to question me; but I was proud and so was he, and neither would lead the way.

"'On the night before he died he had retired in his usual health, and I sat up late writing. My desk stood at one side of the fireplace, my back being toward that window. About twelve o'clock I was startled by a rustling behind me, and turned quickly, but saw nothing. Something swept right by me, with a sound like the waving of silk drapery, and passed toward the bed. I followed It, looked under the valance, behind the curtains—all through the room, but found nobody. I said aloud, to reassure myself, "It must have been the wind!" and returned to my desk. In perhaps fifteen minutes I heard the same sound going by me, as before, toward the bed. In just half an hour more by my watch, which I had laid on the desk, It came again. Carlo,

then hardly more than a puppy, howled and ran behind my chair. I felt then that I could bear it no longer, moved toward the bed to awaken my husband. He was sleeping so soundly that, although I passed the candle close before his eyes, he did not stir. I thought I would wait to hear or see something more before arousing him. Nothing came. Carlo went back to his place on the rug, and I sat up all night, listening and watching.

"'Colonel Trueheart arose next morning to all appearance perfectly well. At nine o'clock he had an apoplectic stroke. At twelve he died. His will, executed two years before, directed that I should continue to live here and take care of the place for his children. I have done so at less cost of feeling and health than I anticipated. But once in five years have I had any reason to believe that the uneasy spirit—if spirit it was—still walked the premises. One night, in the second year of my widowhood, as I was coming down stairs, soon after supper, with a light in my hand, I heard the sweeping of a gown, the tap of high heels behind me. On the lower landing I stopped, wheeled short around, held up my light, and looked back. The steps had been close on my track, but the staircase was empty and now silent.

"'I had flattered myself that there would never be a return of ghostly sights or sounds after four years of exemption. Least of all did I dream that one not connected with the family would be visited by such apparitions should they come.'

"This was the story. If Madam guessed at anything else, if she had any theory as to the cause of the visitation, she never intimated it. Captain Macon privately instituted inquiries, at a later period, respecting the past history of the house, but without striking any trail

that promised to unravel the mystery. It had been built by a Trueheart, and the estate had descended in the direct line to the Colonel. We pledged our word voluntarily to Madam never to speak of what we had seen while the truth could affect the value of the property, or cast imputation upon the character of those who had owned it. We kept silent until Madam had been fifteen years in her grave. Then Captain Macon rode over one day to show me a paragraph in a Richmond newspaper. I have it safe up stairs in my reliquary, but I can repeat it, word for word:

"'The march of improvement westward has condemned to demolition, among other fine old mansions, Selma, the ancestral home of the Truehearts. It passed out of the family at the demise of Mrs. Augusta Harrison Trueheart, relict of the late Colonel Elbert Trueheart. In order to effect an equitable division of the estate, the residence and contiguous plantation were sold. The extensive grounds have been cut up into building lots, and the mansion—a noble one in its day, although sadly neglected of late years—standing directly in the line of the extension of ——— Street, has been bought by the city to be pulled down and carted away. In grading the sidewalk of the proposed thoroughfare, it was necessary to dig down six feet below the present level, laying bare the foundations of the building. At the depth of four feet from the surface, directly under the windows, and distant scarcely three feet from the drawing-room, the workmen disinterred the skeleton of a woman of diminutive stature, which had evidently lain there for years. There were no signs of a coffin or coffin-plate. A high tortoise-shell comb, richly wrought, was found by the head. The oldest inhabitant of our city has no recollection of any interment near this spot, nor would decent burial have been made

so close to the surface. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery.'"

Another prolonged pause. Then Harry raised both hands to push up her hair from her forehead, as if the weight oppressed the teeming brain.

"How the storm roars!" she said. "Heaven have mercy upon the homeless souls wandering between sky and earth to-night! Papa told me that the secret is a secret still, the tragedy unexplained. Have you suspicions of your own?"

"I know nothing beyond what you have heard. But —women who die natural deaths and have Christian burial do not wear expensive combs, such as belong to party-dresses, when they are shrouded for the grave. Nor are they thrust into the ground uncoffined!"

NOTE.—The author deems it well to state that she vouches personally for the authenticity of the Dream in Chapter X, and likewise for the truth, in every particular, of the story related in Chapter XI.

She offers no explanation of the latter, nor is she herself a believer in "spiritualistic" phenomena, or in the vulgar hypothesis of apparitions from the world of shades. The history of the Trueheart Ghost is, from first to last, one of *facts*, supported by testimony that cannot be impugned. She has not been able to withstand the temptation to put these upon record as a curious study of the supernatural—or the unaccountable.

CHAPTER XII.

I HAD never been to Richmond in my life, and I was to spend a whole month in the capital of my day-dreams —the mundane type to me, ignorant little provincial that I was, of the city paved with gold and entered through pearly gates. More than this, I was to be the guest of my beloved Miss Virginia Dabney. She had written a long letter with her own dear fingers, addressed on the outside, as within, to me:

Miss Judith R. Trueheart,
Read's Cross-Roads,
——— County,
Virginia.

My mother wrote to me under cover to my grandmother. This letter was all my very own. How grand it looked, with the printed "Paid" in one corner, the stamp of the Richmond Post-Office in the other! Postage-stamps were not introduced until almost twenty years later. Envelopes were unknown, and my correspondent paid ten cents in advance for the thin single sheet, folded ingeniously to foil the curiosity of country officials, and sealed with scented wax.

I broke out with the measles the day after New Year's, and was duly put to bed under all the blankets I could bear, and not a whiff of fresh air or drop of cold water suffered to enter my room for three weeks. During this season I was steamed and toasted and drenched inwardly with hot decoctions until the little color I could boast in health was soaked out of me. The eruption "came out" finely, and went off by or-

thodox degrees, and I appeared below-stairs convalescent, but such a weak-eyed, etiolated caricature of childhood as to alarm even those who were conversant with the "effects of measles." This malady, like scarlet-fever and whooping-cough, "never left children as it found them." Often it did not leave them at all, disease and patient going off together.

Aunt Maria had written to her Richmond friend of my inability to eat, study or read. The result was the invitation aforesaid.

Moreover, again, I traveled in the Hunter's Rest chariot, newer and far more elegant than the Summerfield carriage, and Miss Harry Macon was my traveling companion. The hereditary intimacy between the families was to be cemented by a visit of some weeks from her to the Dabneys. Her maid, a "bright" mulatto, the belle of her set as her mistress was in her rank, accompanied us, flirting on the coach-box with the driver, but subject to whatever call might be made from the interior upon her services.

Furthermore—if aught had been lacking to completest roundness of bliss—Uncle Archie was our equerry. He never appeared better than in the saddle. His well-knit limbs, broad shoulders, straight back—so flat that his mien was soldierly—his excellent seat and easy command of the spirited animal he bestrode were remarkable in a neighborhood where good horsemanship was the rule.

"A prince, every inch of him!" observed Miss Harry once, as he fell into the rear to avoid the wheels in a narrow part of the road. "Sweetbrier!" — she had caught the name from Miss Virginia—"they don't make better men than your uncle there. I respect myself the more when I recollect that I was born within three miles of him. He is so strong, so upright, so *real!* And

he has never once looked at me as if he would like to talk love—or nonsense—to me. I can't say that for another single man in the county. I feel as safe and comfortable and protected when I am with him as I should with my very greatest-grandfather. It is a high compliment, little woman—don't forget it when your turn comes!—to have a young fellow talk to you as if you were another man, with a flavoring of the sister stirred in!"

The February day was clear and fine. I remember the glaze left by the winter's travel upon the beaten red clay of the highway; the scarlet wax-wings feasting on the whitish-blue berries of the cedars; the "cotton-tailed" hares that scudded across the road, or scampered over the dry leaves heaped in fence-corners; the columnar vistas of frost-work in the clayey banks, of which I made for myself a fairy realm, with Giants' Causeways, palaces, and interminable arcades roofed with unbaked red tiles. The motion, the company, the fresh, pure air, wrought magically upon my anæmic frame. I was hungry before the time came for opening the hamper, in which was stowed enough "snack" for a dozen hedgers and ditchers. Uncle Archie accepted a seat in the carriage while we ate as much as we could of it.

Apphia, Miss Harry's Abigail, appeared at the coach door when we halted to accomplish this change, and dropped a courtesy, her golden-bronze visage alive with glee, her cheeks like the sunned side of a Georgia peach.

"Please, Miss Harry! please, Mars' Archie! lemme ride *him!*" nodding at the beautiful hunter that would have followed the carriage as a kitten the one that petted it.

Hardly waiting for the consent given by both, she tossed one of the stirrups over the man's saddle to do

pommel-duty, bounded into the seat thus contrived, gathered up the bridle and rode alongside and behind us for an hour and more, managing the horse dexterously, and sitting him with the graceful confidence of an Amazon. I took in the view of her with lazy enjoyment, appreciating, without the capacity of expressing how and why I did so, the picturesqueness of attitude and costume; the red-and-black handkerchief-turban, the striped linsey-woolsey skirt, yellow and dark-blue, and the scarlet jacket, a cast-off one of her mistress's, which fitted her as trimly as it did the original owner.

"She puts me in mind of a red-winged blackbird," said I, softly, out of my nest of shawls on the back seat which Miss Harry insisted upon giving up entirely to me.

Uncle Archie cast toward me one of the looks I always understood to mean that he was especially and fondly pleased. Miss Harry stooped impulsively to leave a light, swift kiss, such as the humming-bird gives the flower, on my lips.

"You *dear* little thing!" she said, and a silly blur fell between Apphia and me.

I was very weak yet, and these two were so good to me! The world was so full of love and beauty that my heart ached suffocatingly under its portion of happiness. The brooding softness of the unclouded blue overhead, the enveloping and invigorating cheer of the sunshine, were of the same strain with the human tenderness that enfolded me, body and spirit. It was a divine languor that overtook me when I was again disposed among my pillows, covered up, tucked in cozily and ordered to "take a nap, like a darling." My eyelids fell, but not in drowsiness; the talk of my companions rippled over me, with wafts of the cool, sweet air from the pine and cedar forests through which our

route lay for several miles. I could not tell from which I drew the larger accession of strength.

"There is hardly enough body left to hold her soul," I heard, by-and-by, uttered low and compassionately. "I hope the change will do her good."

"I am not asleep, Miss Harry!" said I, unclosing my eyes.

"Never mind!" Uncle Archie answered for her. "We are not talking secrets."

In that case I might lie still and listen, unreproved by conscience. There was a hearty, whole-souled liking between the pair. To this, her prince among true men, Harry Macon always showed the best that was in her. He saw the full current of genuine womanliness under the froth and glitter which was all most people knew for the saucy beauty. Where he could not excuse, he ignored; where he could not justify, he shielded. They talked frankly, but never sentimentally. In such petty scrapes as she would not confide to her father through fear of troubling him, or to her brothers, lest they should rebuke her more sharply than her temper would brook—he was her resort, the kindest, safest counsellor that ever folly found in uprightness. She had two or three such confidences for him that day, neither of them minding me (nobody ever did mind me much), and I recollect how gentle was his plainness of speech, how judicious his advice. One of the topics discussed was the useless adoration of Ronald Craig, the empty-headed, full-hearted master of Buccleuch, one of the noblest estates on James River. As Harry averred, "he tormented the life out of her, offering himself at the full of every moon with regularity that inclined her to believe him a lunatic."

"I told him so one day," she added.

"I am sorry to hear it," returned Uncle Archie, se-

riously. "You would not have done it if you had known that his mother was once insane, although she recovered her reason some years before her death. Don't trifle with true love, Miss Harry. It deserves respect, however you may despise the creature that bestows it. I know you well enough to believe that you would not strike a muddy hound that crawled up to lick your foot. You find fault, and maybe very reasonably, with the softness of Craig's brain. You won't mend that by hardening his heart. You *may* ruin him for time and for eternity. There is only one really safe path in life. That is the straight one. Don't laugh at or tease or play with him. The best and tenderest-hearted of women don't half understand how they can hurt us. If a man puts heart and happiness in your hands, and you cannot accept the gift, try to remember that it is the very best thing he has to offer, and give it back to him at once, with as few words as possible. Help him to bury it out of sight. People of right feeling don't joke while open graves are being filled in."

"Ronald Craig told me, last week, that he believed I would enjoy cracking hickory-nuts on his tombstone," said Harry, peeping from under her eyelashes in a look made up of roguishness and remorse. "And—it seems horrid when I think of it now—but I couldn't help saying that if it had a nice flat top and was near the hickory-nut tree, I shouldn't hesitate to make him useful for once."

I giggled, and Uncle Archie did not attempt to suppress his smile.

"I wonder, sometimes, if your turn will ever come," he said. "When it does, may I be there to see! I warn you that I shall not spare you."

"I shall disarm you by telling you, first of all, what

has befallen me, and engaging you to break the news to Papa. Rod says the double-barreled gun on the hooks near the front door is kept loaded with buckshot to shoot the man to whom I shall say 'Yes.' The dear old father turns a fine olive-green whenever the harrowing possibility of my marriage is referred to. An elopement will be the only hope of life for the unhappy suitor-elect."

"You may depend upon me to the extent of what poor influence I possess. Provided—always—you convince me that you are in earnest, that your happiness depends on my success."

She put out her hand.

"It is a promise! Shake hands on it!"

He hesitated—the raised eyebrows surprised and interrogative.

"Is the test so near? I will not take a step in the dark, you know."

"I am as fancy-free as Shakspeare's 'fair vestal, enthroned by the West.' But in time of peace prepare for war. I may meet my fate in Richmond. Stranger things have happened."

A fraternal hand-clasp sealed the compact. To be recalled how soon, how often, and how sadly!

We stopped for dinner and to feed and rest the horses at a house of entertainment. There was a fine but strong distinction between the managers of such and the people who "kept tavern." Our wayside hostelry, except in its location, within thirty feet of the public road, and in the spaciousness of the stable-yard, also giving upon the thoroughfare, was, in exterior, undistinguishable from the private residence of a planter in good circumstances. The house was white, with green blinds; in summer a dense curtain of vines shaded the long front porch, and the yard was gay with flowers.

The master was smoking a pipe on the porch, basking in the genial sun-warmth, while he talked politics with two guests who had preceded us. He advanced to the gate with hospitable readiness as we drew up before it, saluted Uncle Archie by name; was presented by him to Miss Harry and myself; "reckoned," in response to the question whether we could get dinner there, "there was no manner of doubt about that," and offered his arm to Miss Macon to conduct her to the house. His wife, comely and lady-like, met us at the door and showed Miss Harry and myself to "the chamber," where she had been sitting by a lively fire, with windows and doors open. I was made to lie on the plump, white bed until dinner was ready in the adjoining dining-room. An excellent meal it was, including the conventional boiled ham flanked by cabbage, before the hostess, and the mountainous side-dish of fried chicken, brown, tender, juicy and savory as fried chicken never is outside of Virginia. Spriglets of green parsley curled between the toothsome joints, breasts and giblets; crisp slivers of fried bacon garnished the base of the pile; cream-gravy was sent around with each plate, that those who liked the accompaniment might help themselves. Mince-pie and sweet-potato pudding—another Virginia delicacy—pound cake and delicate "sweetmeats," *i. e.*, preserved watermelon-rind, carved curiously and elaborately, brittle and like unto emerald in clarity of green; milk, rich with cream, coffee and tea formed the second course. Cider was served with the meats. For this there was no extra charge. The proprietor of the house of entertainment sold no liquors, nor could any except his personal friends obtain so much as a glass of spirits or wine from his well-stocked cellar. A gentleman's wines—he was ranked as a gentleman by himself

and others—were as much his personal property as his watch and waistcoat.

"I do not keep a tavern, sir!" was the haughty response to applications from the uninformed traveler for toddy, mint-julep or milk-punch.

If he had been a tavern-keeper a swinging sign would have indicated that he held a license, took orders and charged accordingly. As a rule, the guests fed and lodged by him were quiet gentlefolk, who paid his moderate bills without a tinge of condescension or patronage, or feeling that he lost caste by receiving a *quid pro quo.* If there were obligation on either side it was on theirs for cordial hospitality, for which money was an inadequate acknowledgment.

Darkness fell before we came in sight of Richmond. The swinging of the carriage on its easy springs; fatigue and excitement; the comparative silence of my companions as twilight induced revery; the closing glooms that obscured wayside fences, and blotted, as with a sepia wash, hill and forest and plain—made me first dull then sleepy. I shut my eyes, turned my face to the cushioned back of my seat, and, after listening for a few minutes to the rumble of the wheels, the creak and jingle of the harness, the thud of hoofs on the sandy turnpike, varied by rings against infrequent stones, I lost myself entirely in a dreamless blank of slumber.

I was aroused by a far-off hum like the swarming of bees, that grew louder and nearer when I made out who I was, but not where. The glare of light upon my unsealed eyes drew from me an ejaculation of pain.

A soft, warm hand covered them instantly; a gentle arm was about me; lips met mine in two, three kisses; a voice cooed in my ear:

"Sweetbrier! do you know where you are?"

"In heaven?"

The dreaming brain actually sent the question to the tongue that was as yet too languid to articulate it. In another second I whispered, "I know *you!*"

She let me see her then. Her face that was lovelier than ever, was still the nearest to mine. She knelt by the sofa on which Uncle Archie had laid me after bringing me in his arms from the carriage, swathed in shawls like a mummy, and almost as dead asleep. Her blue eyes were joyous and tender; her smile was as much for me as for the lover who, I next perceived, stood by her, looking down at us both.

We were in a room that was very lofty and grand in my sight. An astral lamp was on the centre-table. Crimson damask curtains, and a repetition of the same warm tone in carpets and furniture; the gleam of picture-frames, and candelabra hung with tinkling prisms —most of all, a pier-glass that reflected the group about the sofa, intensifying the radiance of fire and lamp, and doubling the apparent length of the apartment—made to my rustic appreciation a scene of palatial splendor.

A prettyish woman of perhaps thirty-five pressed now to Miss Virginia's side.

"You mustn't let them plague you, honey!" she said, as I was not used to hear people speak, with a plaintive downward inflection engrafted on a slight natural lisp. I always had a confusing notion, in listening to her, that her tongue must curl over at the tip as she talked.

"I am certain, Virginia, that she wants to go right straight off to bed. It 's right down mean to wake her up!"

"She shall do just as she likes, mother," said the step-daughter dutifully.

She never disputed a point with the wife, who was

her husband's junior by twenty-five years. He was presented to me now—short, good-humored, portly, and a disappointment to one who had pictured Captain Macon's ancient comrade as like that stately warrior in person and manner. Two boys of fifteen and ten, the children of the second marriage, completed the family group.

Uncle Archie declined to sit down, although hard-pressed to become the guest of the household while he stayed in town. He always put up at "The Columbian," the popular head-quarters of country gentlemen who liked substantial fare and liberty of action. With stubborn fidelity to the traditions of their fathers that was worthy of their English ancestry, the planters and yeomen of Virginia sustained the old-fashioned inn in the crooked by-street leading to the river long after the tide of general travel set in the direction of handsome hotels with modern improvements established in fashionable quarters. The parade of drilled waiters and long-drawn-out state of successive courses was intolerable to men who "had something else to do besides spending hours a day at the table." They contended that the cookery at "The Eagle" was infinitely inferior to that at "The Columbian"—in brief, that when they came to town unencumbered by wives and daughters, they meant to be comfortable in the ugly tavern despised by the rising generation.

Major Dabney and his wife were distressed at the recusancy of Miss Harry's escort, and proclaimed their chagrin vehemently. Miss Virginia said, quietly raising her shining eyes to his:

"Mr. Bradley will be disappointed. We have invited him to take tea and spend the evening with you."

"Evening" in the country meant after dinner, at whatever hour that repast was taken. After sunset

was "night." The afternoon was an unknown quantity in our diurnal computation. The mere use of the word stamped one as town-bred, or as an imitator of cockney phrases. I had time to wonder why Mr. Bradley had not yet appeared if the invitation was for the evening, before Uncle Archie could be heard above the renewed clamor of remonstrance:

"If you will allow me to return after I have been down town to put up my horse and secure my room, I will with pleasure accept your invitation to supper."

He was detained a few minutes longer by Mr. Bradley's arrival. Already the air of city life had taken effect upon his outer man. The cut of his clothes—a suit of dark-blue cloth, faultless in fit—of his hair, even the gloves, one of which he drew from the right hand as he entered, bore no correspondence to the personal belongings of the Summerfield tutor. The healthful tan of his complexion was superseded by a clear pallor that enhanced the refined cast of his features. The alteration did not extend to his manner. The buoyant step, the happy smile, the cordial tone were the same that had won Aunt Betsey's best graces, and converted into a friend every acquaintance he had made while with us. I felt my forehead flush with prideful delight under his kiss, saw Uncle Archie's honest eyes kindle as their hands met in a long clasp. Then my foolish flutter subsided into deadest dullness; my sick heart sank until I fancied it must settle in my heels.

I wished Uncle Archie had taken off his dreadnought surtout, or, at least, removed the cloth leggings, or "wrappers," as they were styled, that enveloped his legs like warlike greaves. Horsemen wore these upon long winter journeys for warmth and for protection from the mud. They were strapped under the boots like gaiters, buttoned up on the outside of the legs and gar-

tered above the knees. His hair, tossed and curling after the day in the saddle, was a shaggy mane when contrasted with his friend's orderly locks. I could have cried with heartache to think that Miss Virginia's eyes rested upon the two, standing face to face, animated and engrossed by the pleasure of reunion, yearned to cast my arms about the mud-plashed knees and tell one of the men how ardently I loved him—how much better for the unwilling admission to my secretest soul that he was the sufferer by the comparison I—and perhaps another—had made.

It was some poor relief when the outer door clanged behind him. My cheeks cooled gradually while I feigned to hearken to Mrs. Dabney's twaddle. It reminded me from that evening of plum-porridge, insipid mush, in which an ever-stirring spoon brought continually to the surface raisins, currants, citron-slips of meaningless endearment. I was her "pretty baby," her "precious girl," her "sweetest Judith," and her "heart's treasure," before she finished the harangue upon the propriety of a measure nobody thought of gainsaying, to wit: that the travelers should be taken up stairs to wash and get ready for supper.

"Which shan't be brought in till that dear Mr. Read comes back, if he don't make his appearance until midnight," she assured us. "So, my dearest Miss Harry—I just *can't* say 'Miss Macon,' when I've heard so much of you—the Major and our darling Virginia are forever praising you up, dear, and none too much—not a bit! I'll say that to your face. You needn't hurry down stairs. Take plenty of time, honey. I dare say our dear Mr. Bradley will be impatient to see you again, but, if the truth were known, 'tisn't the first time he has had to dance attendance upon a beauty's pleasure."

When Uncle Archie returned we were reassembled down stairs, and the great folding-doors between the two rooms being opened, we had a view of a table in the back parlor so profusely set out with crystal, china and silver that my shaken nerves danced again. I sat at the Major's right hand, as far away as I could be removed from the voluble hostess. Subsequently I suspected daughterly artifice in this. Time had inured Miss Virginia to the incessant bubble and spatter of the porridge-pot, but she shielded her friends from the infliction whenever she could without wounding the poor lady. The Major did not trouble me with questions, and kept a hospitable eye on my plate. Miss Virginia was next to me on the other side, Mr. Bradley sat by her, Uncle Archie was opposite to me, and Miss Harry his nearest neighbor. She and the *ci-devant* tutor carried most of the light weight of the conversation. They drew out one another admirably at all times, and tonight the exchange of challenge and repartee were like the flash and catch of a glittering ball in spirited play. The Major dropped knife and fork several times in a convulsion of merriment; the boys were in a perpetual titter, and Mrs. Dabney exhausted her expletives in description of her enchantment at seeing the dear young people *so* happy.

"How I *do* like to see young folks enjoy themselves!" she twittered in pauses and out of pauses. "If there's one thing that makes me happier than another it is to see young folks having a royally-good time. When they are in spirits they are in such spirits, and our young folks—indeed, to tell the truth, most *of* the young folks that visit here, and, for the matter of that, young folks all over the world, so far as I know—those that are in good health I mean, of course, for without health, my dear Mr. Read, what *is* life?—certainly are, generally

in excellent spirits. And, as I was saying to precious Virginia only to-day, I do hope and pray that our sweet Miss Harry will have a pleasant visit, and you must make yourself perfectly at home right off, my love—all our darling daughter's friends are our friends; and I 'm sure when that lovely Maria Read was here in December we certainly treated her exactly as if she had been one of us, exactly—and a more inte*re*sting girl I never met in all my life; never, if I do say it to your face, Mr. Read, if she is your own born sister; but if so, why not praise her?—I could never see why not—and if the truth were known, I dare say plenty of young men would agree with me; don't you think so, Mr. Bradley?"

Harry Macon had just tossed a saucy equivoque at him. His lips were apart in the suspended retort, as he bowed his apology to the head of the table.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Dabney! I did not quite catch what you were saying!"

Who ever did?

Her good nature was invincible. "Very excusable, I am sure. I don't mind people's talking while I 'm running on. I rather like it. It makes things more sociable all around; and what are we put into society for but to *be* sociable? and I was never one to stand upon my dignity, nor my p's and q's, either; and my sisters tell me I 'm quite too youthful in my feelings for a woman of my age and a man of the Major's, though for the matter of that, I never gave a thought to his being old enough, you may say, to have been my father. I was just praising that pretty, sweet, delightful Maria Read. I fairly fell in love with her, and I was not the only one, if the truth were told. I wonder how many hearts she has broken in her day?"

"I think she would be very sorry to break any, madam. She is very humane."

Mr. Bradley's answer was given in perfect composure; his countenance baffled even such scrutiny as I fancied I saw in Harry Macon's glance.

Uncle Archie looked up from his plate directly at the host. "It would seem now, Major Dabney, as if the action of the Legislature may, after all, go against the bill we were discussing when you were at Summerfield last month."

The diversion was effectual. The Major launched vigorously into asseveration that the present legislators were in covenant with the enemies of national and state peace and prosperity; into prophecies "that the time was near at hand when Virginia would expiate the blunders of her political leaders in blood and tears, sir; that for his part he was tempted to question whether the experiment of a republic were not a failure, and to believe that the hope of the country lay in absolute monarchy—a despotism, sir; a strong government, sir! Confound the rascals who are steering us on to ruin, sir; driving the Ship of State on to the breakers of political wreck, in the interest of sugar planters and far-south cotton growers who are not worth a sou-marquee per hundred, bodies and souls—not a Continental blank, sir!"

"Major, my blessed love!" cried Mrs. Dabney—"it makes my blood run cold to hear *how* near you come to swear-words in the presence of ladies and children. I *wish* you would be careful, and you a vestryman—although if the truth were told, not a communicant, which would make your language a little worse; and everybody, even that blessed innocent sitting by you, must know that 'Continental blank' is only a whipping-the-old-boy-round-the-stump way of using a term no gentleman would utter in a lady's hearing. It really frightens me, my dear Mr. Read, and as our dear Mr. Bradley must have observed before this, when the Major

begins to talk politics, he gets so furious, when on most subjects he has the temper of a lamb and wouldn't hurt the feelings of a fly; and, if the truth is told, all his vaporing is wasted, for everybody knows that his bark is certainly worse than his bite."

How, in this Liberty Hall, reared by this hearty, easy-going, over-indulgent couple, Virginia Dabney acquired her perfection of breeding and refined manner, was a puzzle to older students of human nature than the thin-faced child who tired herself out in considering it that night. It was decided by tender-hearted stepmother and daughter that it would be unkind to send me off to bed early on this my first evening in a strange house. I was laid among pillows in a shaded corner of a sofa, covered with a shawl and left to rest or look on as I liked.

"It will not be rude to go to sleep," added my young guardian, disposing the mufflings about my shoulders with a loving squeeze and pat.

The prolonged siesta of the afternoon saved me from this breach of politeness. I was wide awake in more than one sense of the term. That evening was what I named to myself "one of my nicest make-believe times." I had never seen a coal-fire until the generous pile in the brass-mounted grate introduced me to the mimic volcanoes I never wearied of watching, from the moment the tiny bubble on the bituminous lump began to swell into a hillock until the blazing puff tore open the crater, that speedily burned into extinction and black emptiness. I liked the smell from the first. To this hour it is as dear to me for the sake of those bygone days and Richmond memories—as infinitely and touchingly suggestive—as the odor of burning peat to the exiled Scot, who reckons "mountain dew" flavorless without the smoky tincture contracted in the distillation.

Mrs. Dabney fussily, but with amiable intentions, swept husband and sons off to her own sitting-room when we left the table.

"Don't be a goose, Major, darling!" she said, when he "reckoned the young gentlemen wouldn't mind having a cigar apiece while he smoked his pipe, and the whole party might as well adjourn to the sitting-room." "*You* wouldn't have touched a pipe in Pa's parlor while you were courting *me*. Not that I mean, of course, that the cases are at all alike"—hurriedly, and in genuine concern, as her lord burst out laughing—"but I would say, everybody knows young folks have notions about smoking that they get over when they are an old married woman like me, and things are different now from what they were in our day, and get differenter every year, seems to me, and curtains *do* hold stale tobacco-smoke so, and it's natural young girls shouldn't quite like it, and gentlemen's coats and hair and whiskers too, for the matter of that, and indeed, if the truth were told—Virginia, my angel! tell your friends what I meant to say. Virginia always understands me, even when I'm not just certain myself what I started to tell."

"Yes, mother, we all know what you mean. You must not mind father's teasing," returned the daughter, consolingly.

To show that she was not disconcerted by the innuendo conveyed in her father's laugh, she crossed the room to Uncle Archie and began talking to him about Summerfield people and news. Her seat was a stuffed ottoman, and she had to lift her face to see him fairly. The mellowed light from the astral lamp fell on her profile, chastened her bloom and smiling eyes. She questioned in a subdued key, and he answered in the same.

Miss Harry, flitting aimlessly about the room, picked up a flute from the piano.

"Why, this is yours!" she said in her clear, full tones to Mr. Bradley.

The abruptness of the appeal, accustomed as he should have been to her ways, took him by surprise. He changed color perceptibly—and he seldom blushed.

"Is it?" he began, extending his hand for the instrument.

Miss Virginia glanced over her shoulder without other change of posture, spoke simply and naturally.

"Hadn't you missed it, Mr. Bradley? You left it on the piano the night we tried those new songs. I found it after you went away. I am glad it happens to be here, for you and he, Harry, will give us some music worth having.

"So you and Maria are reading 'Ivanhoe' together, Mr. Read! It is my favorite among all of Scott's novels."

The chat relapsed into a confidential murmur. Harry and Mr. Bradley looked over the music and made selections for future practicing, taking—considerately, as I thought—a long time to suit themselves.

Nestled in my shadowed corner, my heart light as a feather, my mind a halcyon sea gleaming with dyes whose glories never outlive youth and inexperience—I watched and dreamed.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNCLE ARCHIE passed four days in town, sleeping, breakfasting and dining at the "Columbian," devoting his forenoons to business, giving afternoons and evenings to us. On Sunday morning we went to the First Presbyterian Church. The Dabneys were Episcopalians. Miss Virginia had proposed that we should attend the Presbyterian place of worship out of compliment to her guests. She and Uncle Archie, Miss Harry, Mr. Bradley and myself formed the party. We drove down the hill in the family carriage, and walked home at noon, strolling slowly up the irregular ascent in the sunshine that burnished the pineapple on the spire of the old church in the valley beneath us into a pyramidal flame against a sky of exquisite clearness and color. Miss Virginia held my hand in her right, her left resting on her attendant's arm, as was the custom in polite society. Once Uncle Archie said gently to her:

"I do not feel your weight. Your hand might be a little gray feather on my sleeve. Do you never accept more assistance from an escort? Are you so independent?"

"You have named the very trait in which I am most deficient. I am a sad coward, morally and physically."

"Ah! *that* you cannot make me believe. I have known you too long and too well."

I worked my fingers in the design of slipping them out of her clasp, and falling back to walk with Miss Harry, whose relations with Mr. Bradley were, I was sure, many removes from tender. The gray glove tightened upon the restless digits in determination I

could not resist. Flattered, in spite of my disappointment on Uncle Archie's account, I wondered if he might not come to consider her inconveniently fond of me. With very nebulous notions of the etiquette of wooing and being won, I conceived artless stratagems of leaving the lovers to themselves evolved from the germinal principle that they had much to say they would not like others to hear. I mourned secretly at the paucity of opportunities that fell to them on this, the last day of Uncle Archie's stay in Richmond. Mr. Bradley dined on Sundays with the Dabneys, in whose hospitable abode he was already received as a privileged family friend. Miss Harry seconded my awkward maneuvers ably by keeping him in close attendance upon her, and I took my book and cricket to a front window, as far as I could get them and myself from both couples. Uncle Archie did not fret or sulk, as a more mercurial suitor might have done, at the seeming impossibility of securing a private interview. His demeanor was, to the general eye, absolutely the same, whether he talked with the mother or the daughter. Mr. Bradley's eyes said more gallant things to Harry Macon in ten minutes than the grave, kind ones bent upon her friend's face would or could express in as many days. Friendly he was always—sometimes brotherly in continual thoughtfulness of her comfort and remembrance of her views and wishes. Loverly he was not in the sight of others as loverliness is usually exhibited.

In the afternoon we attended service at the Monumental Church. It is now a quaint, shabby little octagonal temple that, but for the mournful interest clinging to the tomb in the vestibule, would long ago have made way for other structures. At the date of this, my first visit to it, it was less than twenty years old and the fashionable church of the city. I forgot to

watch and plan for the lovers in the emotions awakened by the place. The surpliced clergyman, the stately service, known to me hitherto only by such maimed rites as I had witnessed on the Episcopal Sabbath at Old Singinsville, where perhaps a dozen worshippers at most were provided with prayer-books, the roll and peal of the organ—wrought me up to a state of exaltation I naturally mistook for devotion. I sat motionless, my eyes full of tears, rapt in ecstacy and dream. The full-voiced responses moved me to a fervor of petition felt by few others present. The chants brought before me visions of Solomon's Temple and priestly processions led by Asaph, or, it might be, by the Royal Musician in person, making a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob with the timbrel, the pleasant harp and the psaltery.

"It helped me to understand the Psalms," wrote I priggishly to Aunt Maria in the letter Uncle Archie was to take with him on the morrow. "I suppose it is a *horrid* thing to say, but I *do* wish my great-grandfather had not gone to hear Samuel Davies and turned into a Presbyterian."

On our way out we paused to look at the monument in the porch, Major Dabney kindly waiting for me while I read the names lettered on the four sides, and telling me many particulars of the catastrophe that led to the erection of the church. He had been himself present at the burning of the theatre, and, pleased by the eager interest excited by his mention of this fact, took me into the yard surrounding the building to describe the playhouse, how the fire originated, and the rapid progress of the tragedy. He showed me where stood Gilbert Hunt, the stalwart negro blacksmith, still living in Richmond, who caught twenty men and women as they leaped or fell from the windows, and, as we walked up

the street, entered into a detailed narration of the event, the particulars of which were indelibly stamped on my mind.

He was at the theatre on the night of December 26, 1811, with his first wife, Miss Virginia's mother.

"We were with a party of friends in the lower tier of boxes," he said. "When the alarm was raised I said to my wife, 'Keep perfectly still and obey my directions!' I then jumped over the front of the box into the pit, held up my arms and told her to come to me. She was light and agile, and obeyed without a second's hesitation. The other ladies followed, and I hurried them out before the passage and stairs were choked by the crowd. My friend, Honorable Abraham Venable, a distinguished citizen, and the president of the Bank of Virginia, was in the box next to mine. As I leaped into the pit I heard him say, 'Not a person shall stir from this box until I give the word!' He supposed that the panic would subside in season to allow an orderly escape. Every one of his party perished. My dear young friend, Lieutenant Gibbon—a noble fellow!—tried to carry out in his arms poor Sally Conyers, to whom he was engaged. She fainted at the first alarm. Both were lost."

He stopped, steadied himself upon the right leg, brought the heel of the advanced left foot back with a flourish, to fit into the hollow of the right, and swept, with hat in hand, a profound bow to a lady just crossing the street in front of us.

"Good afternoon, madam! I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you quite well! My dear"—to me when she was beyond earshot—"*she* was there that night! You observe that she limps slightly? She fractured her leg in jumping from a window. Mr. Marshall, from Wythe County—an excellent gentleman—broke his neck

in the leap from the same window a moment afterward. Poor Robert Greenhow was thrown down the stairs, over the heads of the crowd struggling to escape, holding his little boy in his arms. Both escaped with their lives, but Mrs. Greenhow was among the victims. Do you see that house over there ?" designating a frame dwelling on a parallel street. "Early next morning—very early, for nobody in Richmond slept that night, and I had been back and forth to the theatre for hours—I was passing that house and saw on the porch Mrs. Green, the actress who had played 'The Bleeding Nun' the night before. She was still in the white dress, streaked with red paint, in which she had played her part; her hair was streaming down her back, and she was wringing her hands and shrieking out the name of her daughter—'pretty Nancy Green,' they called her, poor child! —who had been burned alive in the theatre. That was *real* tragedy! I pray Heaven I may never look upon the like again! A cousin of my wife tied on her cloak in a hurry that evening, on being told that her escort was waiting for her, and pulled the cherry ribbon-strings into a hard knot. She was fretted, and jerked at them impatiently, only to tie them more tightly. At the theatre she made another effort to undo the knot, then tried to break the strings. They were new and strong, and sewed on securely, and, in a very bad humor, she let them alone. When she was dragged through the crowd into the street, more dead than alive, all her clothing had been torn from her in the struggle excepting this cloak, still tied about her neck, and her shoes, which were laced about her ankles."

"Theatres must be very wicked places!" I ventured, shudderingly. "I should be afraid ever to go into one. I suppose this fire was sent as a judgment to teach people not to attend plays."

The veteran's eyes twinkled shrewdly.

"Churches burn down sometimes," he said. "And dwelling-houses oftener than churches. Solomon's Temple was burned two or three times, and at last the foundations were sowed with salt. I've long since given up trying to interpret the judgments of Divine Providence. Richmond will never know a sadder week than that which followed on the heels of our Christmas twenty years ago. My dear wife could never see a play-bill again without horror. I haven't the same feeling exactly, but I am glad a church was built on the site of that theatre."

We walked on silently for a square or two, the thump of his stout cane on the brick sidewalk the loudest sound in the Sabbatical stillness. From the river in which the fair city bathes her feet arose a ceaseless, languorous murmur—the wash of the rapids over hidden rocks and past greening islets. The delicious weather of the past week had recalled blue-birds and robins to the spacious gardens that were the pride of affluent citizens, and encouraged a few impatient spring flowers to peep out of the black mould in sunny borders. I have known no peacefuller town-Sabbaths than those of the Richmond of by-gone days. It was more like the leisurely calm of a country village of our time, which progress has forgotten to visit for a hundred years or so—such as Deerfield and Old Hadley—than the bustling liveliness of a capital that now numbers five times as many inhabitants as then made it the commercial emporium of the Old Dominion. Everybody knew everybody else, at least by sight. Acquaintances stopped on Main Street on week-days to exchange elaborate compliments. On Sundays they turned to saunter squares out of their way for the sake of ten minutes' neighborly converse.

Major Dabney shook hands with dozens of people in

our walk homeward, and presented all to "My young friend, Miss Judith Trueheart." To some he added: "Granddaughter of Sterling Read, of Summerfield. You knew her grandparents." To others: "The daughter of our old friend, Tom Trueheart, of Bellair. You must remember Tom?"

Nearly all thus addressed did know my grandparents, or were happy to meet Tom Trueheart's daughter. Two desired to be remembered to my mother, and four remarked on my resemblance to my Huguenot ancestors. One rubicund citizen was accosted in still different fashion.

"Gwathmey! I want *you* to take a particularly good look at this young lady. You were dying with love for her mother once. It is a pity you are getting too bald and fat to wait for her daughter!"

The Major rolled through his world like a social solar orb, infusing geniality and good cheer into all absorbent natures. He had inherited a handsome patrimony, and each of his wives had brought him a comfortable fortune. Like four-fifths of contemporary gentlemen, he had studied law, but had given up the pretense of practice before he was forty. He was a "good liver," without the slightest tendency to dissipation, and found sufficient occupation for mind and body in reading English and American journals, looking after the investments of his capital, in the society of a chosen body of friends of his own stamp, and in making wife and children happy. Mrs. Boffin's "Lor'! let's be comfortable!" should have been lettered on the coat-of-arms that hung over the mantel in the Major's "study." The fine irony of the name was appreciated by the visitor at the first glance at the den in the rear of the family sitting-room. It was a study that reeked with tobacco-smoke, was adorned with prints of famous

race-horses and hounds, and boasted of no literature beyond bulky files of newspapers piled on tables and in corners, and "Roderick Random," "Tom Jones," "Peregrine Pickle" and "Tristram Shandy," put up on a very high shelf over the door to be "out of the children's way."

In political faith the Major was ardent and pugnacious, granted (for the sake of argument) that "Tom" Ritchie, the Nestor of the *Enquirer*, "was a gentleman, sir—no question of it, if a Democrat *can* be a gentleman—of which, the Lord forgive me! I have serious doubts sometimes, sir, 'pon my word I have; but the blood of souls will be found in his skirts, as upon other leaders of that most dangerous and d-d-*diabolical* party, sir!" and served his conscience and country on election day by riding hard between sunrise and sundown to plump his vote for the Whig candidates at the polls of four separate counties, in which he held real estate for that purpose and that alone. Ten men voted upon as many slices of his plantation in Hanover, and he was a freeholder in Chesterfield, Goochland and Powhatan. In the last-named county the doughty partisan had more than once or twice saved the day for the Whigs by driving in to the Court House, less than an hour before sundown, at the head of a cortége of twenty or thirty other patriots from the city, all land-owners in the disputed district, and therefore entitled to cast ballots for the local candidate. Voting was lively work under the old *régime* of "free, white, twenty-one, and a landholder to the amount of at least twenty-five dollars."

For religion the Major entertained a profound respect, for the Church the affectionate preference of a son baptized but never confirmed in her communion. He pitied honest Dissenters, meting out to them the same measure of Christian toleration he bestowed upon

the hapless victims of circumstance who were born outside of Virginia. His reverence for womanhood was sincere and openly expressed. Toward the women of his household his demeanor was chivalrous, his observance of the punctilios of courtesy and deference as exact as was consistent with his jolly heartiness of manner. I—the eleven-year-old pet of his daughter—was "Miss Judith" to him always. In the third week of my residence under his roof he ordered his eldest son from the breakfast-table for chancing to omit the ceremonious prefix from my name. His tastes were not intellectual, but he was not a fool, and he must have known that his wife *was*, yet he was kindly-affectioned toward her, and stiffened the limp wand of her authority over those boisterous spirits, Wickham and Archer, by such appliances as a stout English oath or two, administered upon occasion to the former, and an orthodox horsewhipping to the younger.

What he and his amiable wife thought of the behavior of the elder of the lads in walking from The Monumental with his sister and Uncle Archie I had no means of knowing. Wickham boldly, and to his mother's dismay, averred his intention of settling on the Hanover plantation as soon as he should be permitted to cast aside books and tutors. He had heard much said in praise of Mr. Read's practical husbandry, and talked farm with him industriously all the way up town, somewhat, I suspect, to the scandal of Summerfield notions of Sabbath-day conversation. We found them still at it when we entered the parlor, or, to state the case more accurately, the youth loud in exposition of certain agricultural theories he had formulated through much diligent study of *The Country Gentleman*. Uncle Archie hearkened with outward good-humor, the patient show of interest that had not deserted him, while each minute

of the walk thus consumed had been a pearl dropped from the fast-thinning string to be left empty with the "Good-by" spoken that night.

I was heartily indignant. Not more with the thoughtless boy than with Mr. Bradley, whose pupil he was, and who might have called him off upon one pretext or another. Knowing his friend as he did, and more than suspecting his secret, as he must, with the fine perceptions that were ever on the alert, his engrossment at this juncture in the badinage he was carrying on with Miss Harry was inexcusably selfish.

"Take Miss Judith's cloak and bonnet up stairs, Wickham, my son!" ordered the Major. "Come to the fire, my dear young lady. It is turning deucedly cold, Mr. Read. You will have a disagreeable ride to-morrow. Better stay a day or two longer. A frosty snap can't last long at this season, if the old folks *do* say:

> "'As the days begin to lengthen
> Then the cold begins to strengthen.'"

While Uncle Archie explained why he must decline the invitation, I crept up to him and laid my head upon his shoulder. He drew me silently to his knee, kept his arm about me, while the others gathered around the fire and the talk became general. Once, in the dull red obscurity of blending twilight and fire-glow, he pressed his lips upon my hair, and I clung more closely to him, but neither of us spoke to the other. What need was there of speech? He was always sure on which side my intensest sympathies were to be found; knew that one heart besides his was aching under thoughts of the approaching parting. I think—I hope it was some poor comfort to him to feel that he left so stanch an ally near her whom he would woo, although what poor influence I had must be exerted indirectly.

Our supper was more than usually profuse, in honor of the day and guests. Mrs. Dabney expressed her pleasure in the present enjoyment of dear Mr. Read's company in smothered chicken, smoking hot and savory; her grief in the prospect of his departure in sponge-cake and cream-whips, tinct with peach-kernels; dropped extra lumps of sugar into his coffee, and a pensive trickle of regrets into his ears while he ate and drank. There was a deal of laughing and talking among the others, in which I was gratified to see that Miss Virginia bore a minor part. The repast over, we adjourned to the parlor, and had sacred music for an hour, just as in what I already thought of, as the "dear old times," when three of the quartette sat on the porch-steps and sang, the summer moonlight penciling silhouettes of sweetbrier and honeysuckle-vines on floor and steps—the floor and steps Uncle Archie's feet would press tomorrow night, while his heart would be here!

Did they remember those *al fresco* concerts? and remembering, regret? Did Mr. Bradley, standing at the end of the mantel, marking time with a white forefinger? Or Miss Virginia, supplying a soft second, sometimes inaudible beneath the volume of Harry Macon's soprano? Did Uncle Archie, while his eyes never strayed from the music-book to the face of her who held it with him?

The piano was never opened on Sunday. "It did not look well," thought Mrs. Dabney. "People passing by might think we were playing worldly music—for enjoyment, you know." The young people sang without accompaniment hymn after hymn, coming at length to the fugue they had practiced together that Thursday night in August, when Mammy and I listened in the upper chamber:

"O send Thy light to guide my feet."

"We need Maria's voice in that," remarked Miss Virginia when it was finished. "You must tell her, Mr. Read, that we sang it and more than wished for her."

"It always reminds me of her," said Mr. Bradley, turning the leaves. "But you took the part very well."

"Maria *sings* it. I go through with it!" was the answer. "I think that is just the difference between us in many things. She would *live* and elevate and enjoy a poor life. I just drift and dream."

Both men looked at her. One spoke, so low that the words were lost to the other two in Miss Harry's exclamation over a tune she "had been wanting to hear for ages," and just then discovered in the collection before her. She hummed a few bars to make sure that she identified it.

"It *pains* me when you slander yourself," was what Uncle Archie said, under his breath.

The girl shook her head. "I mean it! If you knew me, you would acknowledge the truth of what I say."

"Don't I know you?"

His smile that, slight as it was, held playful tenderness and triumph, told how he answered the question to himself.

Another negative gesture and a deeper shadowing of the eyes raised in sad fearlessness to his.

"What do you say to 'Old Denmark?'" ("old" even then!) cried Mr. Bradley, in sudden animation. "And here comes Major Dabney, just in time! We are waiting for you, Major! Are you all ready?" giving key and chord in his pleasant tenor voice.

The Major spat into the fire, scraped his throat with a lusty "Ahem!" thrust both hands into his pockets, cast the weight of his pursy body well upon his heels, and prepared to take Denmark. As he sang he tilted

back and forth, raising heels and toes alternately, enjoying his own performance with all his might.

"Now, 'Lenox!'" he said, while the "sounding praise" yet reverberated in the upper halls, and the sweet jingle of the pendants of the candelabra was not quite stilled.

His stentorian tones led off:

> "'Ye tribes of Adam join
> With Heaven and earth and seas,
> And offer notes divine
> To your Creator's praise.'"

Then came the burst in which his soul—and mine—delighted:

> "'Ye holy throng of angels bright
> In worlds of light
> Begin the song!'"

How they—our forbears—loved those pealing fugues, with their billowy rush and chase, continued with increasing energy until to the uninitiated it seemed inevitable that the tune must be beaten to death by the quickly succeeding surges—and the "diapason closing full" upon the long open note where counter and tenor met together, base and treble kissed each other!

"Ah!" sighed the Major sentimentally, but in no wise spent by his efforts, "You should have heard your aunt, Mrs. Waddell, then Miss Betsey Preston, sing those tunes in her youth, Mr. Read! I could have listened forever! And 'Barbara Allen's Cruelty' and 'A Rose-Tree in Full Bearing' and 'The Galley Slave's Lament,' or

> "'Sweet bird that shun'st the noise of folly
> Most musical, most melancholy!'

They used to say of your mother and her that 'their black eyes slew their thousands, their angel voices their ten thousands.' Young men could pay compliments in

those times! They had tongues in their heads and knew how to use them. When one employs such language nowadays, he is ridiculed as romantic. I don't know what we are coming to, in courtship, religion or politics!"

The jeremiade was cut short by the entrance of two young men, who called to invite the ladies to accompany them to Trinity Church (Methodist) where a powerful revival was in progress. Upon reception of civil declinatures of their offer, they decided to remain and spend the evening with the fair ones they could not allure abroad.

At half-past ten the company broke up. I had sat in a corner with my book, too jealous for my uncle's happiness to be drowsy, too intent upon watching for the possible opportunity of saying a few words aside to her he loved that might yet be vouchsafed to him by fate, to care to notice one of the new-comers. I did observe the other, because he haunted the vicinity of Miss Virginia, in overt defiance of conventional rule and criticism. He was in love with her, and did not care who knew it, I concluded, disgustedly. Such a cackling fop he was, with his mirthless simper and ruffled shirt-front and the monstrous watch seal pendent from his fob! His coat was of the latest fashionable tint, "invisible green." The Dabneys' butler, Esopus, himself a dandy, called it "bilibous green." Our beau's waistcoat was of black velvet, as were the collar and cuffs of the coat. His pantaloons were gray, corded at the seams with black. His shirt-collar and wristbands and embroidered satin stock were miracles of stiffness and gloss. This was the being who stole two hours—most dear, because the last—of Miss Virginia's society from the man who listened to Mrs. Dabney when she was in the room, and when she had gone talked quietly on one side of the

"THE TWO GIRLS, WRAPPED IN BEDROOM GOWNS, SAT OVER THE FIRE IN COZY CONVERSE."—p. 221.

hearth with Mr. Bradley while Miss Harry was captivating the stranger gallant, at whom I did not cast a second glance. Nor did I catch his name. Major Dabney had greeted his companion as "Ned Allen."

Uncle Archie made the motion of departure, Mr. Bradley rising at the same time, and saying that he would walk down town with him. The others could not stay behind after this decided measure, but they stood about exasperatingly, voluble with banter and compliment while Uncle Archie made his adieux.

"Give my love—my dearest love—to Maria, and say that I shall write as usual, every fortnight," said Miss Virginia, her hand resting in his a little—just a very little longer than Harry Macon's had done. "And you may all be satisfied that we will do our best to make Judith strong and rosy again."

"And to spoil her?" he asked smilingly.

She had one of my hands in hers. He took the other as he spoke, and bent down to kiss me. I clasped both behind his neck in an unvoiced paroxysm of love and regret. He drew me into the hall to whisper comfort.

"Be brave, dear! You will be very happy here. I shall come for you when you are ready to go home. You and I know how glad I shall be of an excuse to pay another visit soon."

He comprehended that this renewed token of his belief in my sense and discretion would extract much of the bitterness from the parting. Miss Virginia praised my fortitude while she helped me undress, and tucked me up in bed. Then she lay down by me, my fingers folded in hers, until I sank into a sweet sleep.

This must have lasted an hour or more when I awoke, thirsty—a natural sequence of my supper. The two girls, wrapped in bedroom gowns, sat over the fire in cozy converse.

"Indeed—indeed, you are mistaken, Harry!" were the first words I heard. "It would break my heart to believe it. He isn't a marrying man. He has more family cares than most men of double his age. I didn't understand this, for a while; I fancied that he liked me, and I certainly liked him—and—I 'm ashamed to tell it even to you—one day I tried to make him speak out! I forced him to talk of himself, and showed how much interested I was in him and his plans. My cheeks burn this minute when I recollect it. My dear! he *shied* off! There is no other word for it. Then came all the scares and excitements of last summer, and I think they helped cure me—"

"Miss Virginia!" said I, sitting up, in a courageous exercise of self-denial, for I was tingling with curiosity. "Will you please give me a drink of water?"

"Does our talking disturb you?" she inquired, as I drained the tumbler.

"No, ma'am, but I can hear what you say when I am awake."

"Little truth-teller!" She laughed and kissed my forehead. "You will not be much the wiser for what you hear."

She believed what she said. That she was partly right, the event proved.

"What were we speaking of?" she said, returning to her seat by the fire.

"Of Edward Dunallan," answered Miss Harry, and both laughed.

A baby could have seen through a trick so flimsy as the substitution of the novelist's hero's name for one so much like it! But they may not have known that I had heard Major Dabney's address to the aggressively-visible guest in the invisible-green coat.

"Edward Dunallan is a nobleman," continued Miss

Virginia. "Too good, too nearly perfect for such a scrap-bag of foibles and faults as I am. I could never live up to his standard, even if he wanted me to do it. I will not believe that he does, or ever did. He must not—*now!*"

"Virginia Dabney!" Harry's handsome face spoke volumes of suspicious inquiry.

The other hid hers in her hands for an instant, then confronted her friend, laughing, blushing and defensive.

"Even those terrible eyes cannot draw out a confession when there is nothing to tell! I did fancy myself —with a girl's fancy—in love with Mr. Dunallan a hundred years ago. I am clean out of love with him now. That is the whole story."

"'When a stronger than he cometh he taketh from him all the armor wherein he trusted, and divideth the spoils,'" said Harry seriously. "In this case it is the weak who has overcome the strong. If ever man was worth waiting for, this one is. And you are not blind nor deaf nor silly. I lose patience with your affectation of disbelief in his devotion to you."

"Perhaps you are in his confidence?"

As she put the question she lay back in her arm-chair, linked her fingers behind her head, and lifted one tiny foot to the grate. Her hair was unbound, and shawled her as she sat.

> "'Her hair, shedding sparkles from all its bright rings,
> Fell over her white arm to make the gold strings,'"

quoted Harry, eyeing her in affectionate admiration. "Who could help loving you, beautiful witch! No! Mr. Dunallan has never intimated to me the nature of his feeling for you. His sister—the married one—let fall a few words once that would have opened my eyes had they been shut. You know she is my particular

friend. I suspect she had match-making designs upon us at one time—"

"*That* would settle the matter beautifully!" eagerly. "*Now*—Harry!"

"Don't be imbecile, Virginia Dabney! You know we wouldn't marry one another were we the first—or the last—man and woman in the world!"

The tart retort checked the dialogue. Virginia leaned against the brown cushions of her chair, the fair face enrayed by the golden curls. If she had met Disappointment at one turn in her walk through the well-kept garden of her life, he had withdrawn his shadow before the crystal wells of her eyes were clouded. The unrestrained ease of attitude, the tranquil dreaminess of mood belonged to a woman heart-whole and fancy-free. That she had never really suffered was plain. That she could ever endure and live and smile and be fair through the wrestle with love unrepaid, desertion, unkindness, seemed absurd.

Harry Macon sat upright, her locked hands lying on her lap, staring straight into the grate, a vivid picture in her crimson wrapper, her hair tumbling about her shoulders, but put quite away from her face.

"I have seen the man I am to marry—twice—within the last week!" she uttered abruptly, by-and-by.

"Who is he?" Her friend was aroused and intent.

"I do not know yet. I shall soon—I think!"

"Harriet Byron Macon! are you crazy—or trying to quiz me? Where did you meet him?"

"At the corner of a street. I have forgotten the name of it. In front of a large brick house just there with a garden at one side. A two-story house, an oblong octagon in shape—an odd-looking affair, with three arches opening into a porch inclosed on three sides, and overhung with vines. The sun was shining on the red

walls and white porch, and there were violets in bloom somewhere near, for I smelled them. He came around the corner and met me face to face, looked into my eyes, and I knew him at once. He lifted his hat and was gone. The next time we met in the same place. But he spoke to me very softly. It was like the music we hear in our sleep sometimes. He said, 'Beloved as thou art!' Just those words. I can hear them now."

Virginia was gazing at her in utter bewilderment.

"Is this fiction or fact?" she queried between petulance and amusement.

"A dream, my dear—none the less a fact. The surest sort of a fact—that which people call 'prophecy'—and twice given. Look in your Bible there for Genesis xli: 32."

"I am not good—I shall never be wise," she went on while the other looked for the passage, "but I believe in the Bible. All of the Macons believe in dreams. Some of us have the gift of second-sight."

A fair face, grave to earnestness, looked from the open Bible to the seeress.

"What was he like?"

"Like Saul for height and strength, like Apollo for beauty, and I fell at his feet and worshipped him!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS VIRGINIA was to have gone with us that morning. I often speculate as to what change might have been wrought in one life had the original plan been carried out. For an important purchase was the order of the day, even party dresses for the two young ladies I was to make the round of certain stores with them, and we had our bonnets on when country friends called on Mrs. Dabney and her daughter.

The latter was disappointed, but rallied swiftly to propose the next best thing.

"This afternoon will do as well for our shopping. But the weather is too beautiful for you to stay in the house. Go out for a walk. Judith has never been to Gamble's Hill. The view will be fine to-day, the air is so clear."

To Gamble's Hill we accordingly bent our steps. There was then but one house upon the summit, the family seat that gave the eminence the name it bears. The "white house" familiar to the readers of "Wirt's Life and Letters" still looks down upon city and river, but it is gray with years and mournful of mien. The beholder whose thoughts are with the past glories of Richmond need not strain his imagination in order to detect a survey of sad amaze in window-brows, disdainful calm in the broad stretch of the roof as the shadows of smart new buildings press nearer and nearer the massive walls. While we strolled to and fro on the turf, enjoying sunshine, breeze and landscape, Miss Harry told me the history of William Wirt's courtship. How Miss Gamble, whose father owned the house before us, while she would not marry a drunkard, yet loved him

for what he had been and could be, and was faithful to that memory and possibility. How, as he lay one day in a tipsy stupor by the roadside, she chanced to walk that way, and covered the flushed face with a delicate cambric handkerchief marked with her name. When he awoke, some children told him that "a beautiful lady" had been his Good Samaritan. In an agony of shame, love and gratitude, the sobered man vowed to himself and to Heaven to shake off the debasing vice, and kept his word.

I give the anecdote on the authority of those who claimed to know whereof they spoke. At the same time I admit that it may possibly come under the censure pronounced by Wirt's biographer upon "coarse and disgusting charges of vulgar excess, which I am persuaded," the writer affirms, "are utterly groundless."

Kennedy's description of his hero's foible is mellifluous rhetoric:

"We may not wonder that, in the symposia of those days, the graver maxims of caution were forgotten, and that the enemy of human happiness, always lying at lurch to make prey of the young, should sometimes steal upon his guard and make his virtue prisoner."

"I don't see how she could love a drunkard," was my comment upon Miss Harry's story.

"He loved *her*, Sweetbrier! He was tender and true to her. Falsehood and bitter words are among the things that kill love at the root."

I looked up into her face, comprehending the words, but hardly the tone.

"Nobody could be false or unkind to *you*, Miss Harry!"

"Thank you, dear," as simply as I had uttered the naïve compliment. "Unkindness would be hard for me to bear. I have been petted all my life."

I remember that we walked down the hill rather soberly, along what is now Fourth Street, through a sparsely-built region. A few manor-houses, environed by gardens, were the dwellings of well-known citizens, and the streets followed the fences and undulations of these grounds in a perfectly accommodating and feudal spirit. We turned down at Main Street, where buildings were hardly more frequent, although the lower end of the street was the busiest part of the town. Before one house was an organ-grinder with a monkey. I squeezed Miss Harry's hand hard.

"You would like to stop and listen, wouldn't you?" said she, kindly. "So should I."

We waited on the sidewalk opposite while the musician ground out "Home, Sweet Home" and sang "Buy a Broom" to an organ accompaniment, his wife beating a tambourine. My eyes filled with tears while I listened. Neither the Freybourg organ nor the sweetest of Swedish songsters brought such pure, sweet drops to my lids in years when I knew—more or less?

Miss Harry gave me a silver sixpence to put in the hat the monkey passed around, and as I ran across the street to drop it in, followed me with the slow, imperial grace that belonged to her gait.

The Savoyard took off his cap at her approach; his swarthy, pinched-featured wife courtesied. The little crowd of urchins, white and black, fell away abashed.

"I t'ank you, my ladee!" said the man, in humblest respect.

"You are welcome!"

She bowed in recognition of the civility. The Macons were too high-bred for superciliousness. Uncle Archie spoke truly in telling her that she would not maltreat a muddy dog, and this man was even farther removed

from her estate than one of her father's pointers or fox-hounds.

She tarried with me while he played a merry tune to exhibit the miniature dancers in the upper front of the instrument. The modern hand-organ lacks these ornaments, and the rising generation is egregiously defrauded in consequence.

"Thank you!" said Miss Harry, and I echoed the acknowledgment. We walked on, my mind full of the music, my imagination stimulated by the sight of the lively monkey.

"I wish I could see a great many wild animals," I ejaculated. "Bears, lions, elephants—such as we read of."

"Wickham told me last night that a menagerie and circus will be here this week," rejoined my companion. "Perhaps we may go."

"Miss Harry!" in a gasp of rapturous surprise.

She laughed, shaking the hand she held back and forth.

"What a nervous elf you are! Get strong fast, and you shall see bears, monkeys and tigers to your heart's content. I smell violets—don't you?"

At this instant some one came so suddenly around the corner of Fifth Street, which we had just reached, as to brush against me and throw me down. I was not hurt, for Miss Harry did not let go my hand. The cause of the mishap laid hold of me on the other side, and the two had me on my feet before I quite grasped the fact of my overthrow.

"I beg a thousand pardons!" said a deep, rich voice regretfully. "I hope you are not hurt!"

"Not at all, thank you," stammered I, as Miss Harry did not speak.

She behaved queerly, leaning against the brick wall

behind her, very pale and staring incredulously at the stranger. He could not help observing her manner. He uncovered his head, bowed very low and gracefully.

"Forgive my awkwardness, madam! I am afraid that I alarmed you very much. Can I do anything for you? You seem faint."

Faintness never called up such superb coloring as mantled her face at this address. Her smile was brilliant and ineffably sweet; her voice gentle; her eyes seemed unable to leave his.

"I was startled—nothing more! I thank you for picking up my little friend. You were not at all to blame. Good morning!"

She bent her head in passing onward. He bowed again. It was the exchange of salutations between a young duchess and a prince of the blood. He walked down Main Street. We turned up Fifth, along which he had come.

"Judith!" said Miss Harry, in changed accents. "I *am* a little faint! I must sit down!"

She sank upon the lowest step of the corner house.

"Let me ring the bell and call somebody!" begged I, affrighted.

"No! no! I shall be better directly!"

I stood by her, put my arm about her head that she might rest against my breast. She trembled violently, her hands clasped one another spasmodically.

There was a vacant lot opposite, and while I waited for her to recover, I read mechanically, yet not wholly without interest, the advertisement of

"CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE,
UNDER THE IMMEDIATE SUPERVISION OF
MR. VAN AMBURG,
THE MOST RENOWNED
BEAST TAMER IN THE WORLD!"

on a glaring yellow placard six feet square. Beneath the announcement were lions in cages with men's heads in their mouths, and a woman standing on one foot on the back of a careering saddleless horse; and in immense red, white and blue letters, the names of

"MADEMOISELLE CAROLINE PICARD
AND
MR. FREDERIC TREVELYAN,
AND
UNEXAMPLED FEATS OF LEAPING AND RIDING!!!"

I was perusing it from top to bottom for the third time when Miss Harry straightened herself up and spoke quite naturally.

"It was very foolish in me to be shocked by such a little thing. But I was utterly unprepared— I am entirely well again. I am glad nobody came by or saw us from the windows."

In rising she turned to look at the house. She had been sitting on the steps of a sort of vestibule. In front were three brick arches; at the back of this was the front door, and on each side of it a window. The frontage of the building was three-sided, a long one taking in the vestibule, two shorter slanting back at obtuse angles to join the ends of the house, making in all an eight-sided edifice. A brick wall inclosed spacious grounds. Tall magnolias arose above the coping, ivies fell in loops and streamers on the street side, and vines clambered over the doorway. Snow-drops were sprouting in the narrow strip of front yard, and the sun-warmed air held the subtle, pervasive scent of early violets.

I grew dizzy under an unaccountable sense of familiarity with it all. Yet where had I seen it, unless in my dreams? A light pierced the whirling fogs. This was the place Miss Harry—not I—had seen in the

vision she related a fortnight ago—the spot where she was to meet her "fate"—him of whom she had said, "Like Saul for height and strength—like Apollo for beauty!"

She took my cold hand in hers.

"Your wits were shaken by the fall, I am afraid, dear child! How white you are! Does your head ache?"

"No, ma'am!" I managed to say. "But I feel strange—somehow!"

With the inexplicable reticence of childhood, I approached the truth no more nearly than this. Perhaps she did not know that I had overheard the dream. Or she might not have recalled it herself. Or, and more probably, she did not choose to have me allude to it. The part of genuine politeness in such a case was, I had been instructed to believe, to follow her lead. For all that, my head continued to spin, my whole body to feel as "strange" as if I had drained a glass of champagne. My ankles twisted as I trod pavements that sank and swelled under my feet. We hardly spoke during the rest of our walk. At Major Dabney's gate my conductor paused, her hand on the latch.

"I have tired you out, Sweetbrier! I am a selfish wretch!"

"Miss Harry Macon! how can you say such a thing!" cried I, excited and shrill.

"Hush-sh-sh!" whispered she, agitatedly.

A manly step rang on the sidewalk. I saw a rosy aurora sweep over her cheeks and forehead, wondrous light arise in her eyes. Her beautiful head bent in silent response to the mute salutation she received from the stranger who had run me down. I had a good look at him now. He was a model of manly comeliness and athletic grace, tall, straight, with a Greek profile, liquid Italian eyes, and a mouth that in its perfect lines and

haughty curves, reminded one of Byron's. A half-smile touched it, and glinted on his eyes as they fell on me—a look of apology, amusement and kindly congratulation; his swift stride slackened, as if he longed to stop and speak, but he contented himself with a respectful bow, removing his hat high from a close crop of dark curls.

Miss Harry stood motionless, her hand on the gate, looking after him until he turned a distant corner. Then she drew a deep breath, the nerve-tension relaxed throughout her frame, but the marvelous luminousness was still in face and eyes.

"Judith!" impressively. "Say nothing of what has happened in the house!"

"I will not!" I engaged readily.

Comprehending intuitively that a secret of moment had accidentally slipped into my hands, I was as much inclined as was she to confine the knowledge of it to ourselves. For the rest of the day I scarcely dared look at her through fear of betraying her confidence by meaning or embarrassed regards. She was quieter than usual, and the far-down light in her eyes did not go out. But she did her shopping, entering with apparent zest into the selection of the India muslin and satin petticoats that were to be the party costume, and at supper joined in the discussion of the circus plan.

At Miss Virginia's instigation we called it "a menagerie" in Mrs. Dabney's presence. The good Episcopalian would have been horrified by the mention of ring and clown, and ground-and-lofty-tumbling, but saw no earthly harm in allowing her sons, her young step-daughter and her guests to make up a party under the escort of the Major and Mr. Bradley, "to study natural history."

"For that is what it is if the truth were told," she

descanted at the meal served the next evening, an hour earlier than common, that we might get good seats in the tent. "And it must be very improving—very! I shall expect you boys to give me an accurate description of every wild beast set down in Goldsmith's 'Animated Nature.' I shall look through the book to-night so as to be ready to examine you when you get back. And, Major, dear, I do hope and beg and pray that you won't let them go too near the monkeys! Recollect, Archer, how the monkey bit Tommy in the fleshy part of the arm in 'Sandford and Merton!' You must take extra shawls, all of you, and don't get on a high seat, for pity's sake! for you are heavy, Major, and you know it, and think what it would be to that sweet little Judith to be on the bench should it give way under your weight; nor on a low one, for fear the beasts should get loose and attack the crowd. I suppose I am nervous about crowds, but I came within an ace of going to the theatre, young as I was—but then I 'turned out' at fifteen—the night it was burned, and dear me, if I had!"

The night was still and bland, and as we set forth upon our expedition the music of the circus band floated up the hill. I had never heard a brass band until that minute, and the lively strains infused themselves like electricity through my veins. I walked on tip-toe, fell unconsciously into dancing-steps I had never learned.

The Major laughed jovially.

"The music has run down into her heels," he said, pointing at me with his cane, as I tripped before him, between the boys. "It 's as natural to dance as to breathe, whatever Presbyterians may say to the contrary, Mr. Bradley."

"Have I denied it, Major? But what of the difference between going to a menagerie and a circus?"

Mr. Bradley had Miss Virginia on his arm, the Major, Miss Harry. The music, and perhaps an exhilarating sense of possible unlawfulness in the frolic, made all hilarious. As we neared the scene of the entertainment, the patter and echo of many other feet heightened the effect of these stimulants. Van Amburg's name gave respectability to what hundreds besides Mrs. Dabney would have reprobated.

"After all," observed Mr. Bradley, raising his voice for the advantage of the juvenile trio, "we need not go into the circus tent at all unless we choose. We are bound for the menagerie."

Archer began a protest, nipped at the third word by his brother's energetic "aside."

"Shut up, you silly beggar! He's only quizzing you. Wild horses couldn't keep him out of the big tent, if he *is* a pious Presbyterian and in love!"

In love with whom? I had just time to decide that some Richmond syren must have the credit of the supposed conquest, and to smile disdainful incredulity, when we came in sight of the encampment. It was on Council Chamber Hill, then a respectable mound, and numbered among the Seven Hills on which the city was built. We climbed the ungraded sides to the main marquée, snowy white in the moonlight. The entrance was packed with young and old. Evidently early suppers had been the rule that evening in town, and good seats were already at a premium. We struggled in with the rest, and it was unanimously resolved that the inspection of the wild-beast cages must be deferred until after "the performances."

"Plenty of time then! plenty of time! and a confounded sight more room!" panted the Major, lunging forward in the wake of the crowd. "I wouldn't have the children miss seeing Van Amburg put his head be-

tween the lion's jaws for a hundred dollars. All that sort of thing is in the main tent!"

In which we were presently bestowed, and by rare luck or management in the best possible position for seeing.

"And being seen!" said Miss Harry, running her eyes from tier to tier.

I suspected whom she hoped to recognize in the mixed assembly the town had been decimated to produce. In quick sympathy with the curiosity I imputed to her, I stared with all my might at every masculine head that overtopped its neighbors. "The Prince," as I had named him in my thoughts, was not to be seen. He might despise circuses as low and frivolous—or, what if he had left town? Miss Harry's composure perplexed me. There was not a shade of disappointment in her sunny face, or in the eyes the consciousness of her happy secret never left, as she withdrew them from the mass of spectators and began to chat easily with her party. She sat at one end of the lofty bench nearest the aisle dividing our section of the amphitheatre from the next. Miss Virginia sat by her and then came Mr. Bradley. I was just above and behind Miss Harry, and in a line with the Major and his boys. The beautiful country girl was the object of much and flattering attention. Admiring looks were bent upon her from all sides, and several gentlemen risked the loss of their seats by walking down or up the steep incline to pay their respects. Her manner was easy and affable, her repartee happy and prompt. She seemed intent upon nothing beyond the amusement of the hour. I did not understand how firmly the fatalistic superstition that Time would bring to her her own had rooted itself among her beliefs. Having seen the Prince, she could wait. The lapse of days nor months could make him less hers than she knew him to be.

The performances began with a race of ponies ridden by monkeys, an absurd scamper that wrought boys up to ecstatic yells and put their elders in good humor. Then the clown tumbled into the sawdust arena, to be bullied by the man with the long whip and to non-plus him by stale quips and factitious facetiousness, and Mademoiselle Caroline Picard, in white silk tights and gauze skirts, less brief than her modern successors are privileged to assume in like circumstances, flew around the circle, sitting, standing and leaping through hoops from the bare back of a milk-white charger that raced at full speed the while she pirouetted and vaulted.

The ring was cleared, and a cage on wheels drawn by two gray horses rumbled in. A big head, tawny and majestic, looked with red eyes between the bars. A lioness crouched in one corner. The band played very softly. We heard the uneasy growlings the captive emitted in stalking back and forth in the pitifully-short round. A man walked leisurely into the arena, attired in a closely-fitting suit of black velvet. In his hand he carried a bamboo walking-stick that a touch of the lion's paw would have snapped as a straw. He opened a slide at the back of the cage, slipped in and shut the grating behind him. The beast growled savagely and was answered by the lioness. The band glided into the mournful melody of Moore's "Farewell, farewell to thee, Araby's Daughter," as the man fell on his knees and thrust the top of his head between the distended jaws dripping with foam. It really entered the dread cavern, but it emerged very quickly, and the huge brute, rising on his hind legs, took his human comrade to his shaggy bosom in a hearty embrace. They tumbled over and over one another like two kittens at play, the lioness coming in for her share in the romp. Then the slide was opened and shut, and the world-renowned

tamer of beasts was bowing his thanks for the screamed hurrahs, the stampings and clappings, excited by his feat and timely escape with his life, and the grumbling lion was rumbling back into the obscurity of the side-scenes.

Miss Harry looked around at me.

"Well, pet! are you glad you came? The best part of it to me is that you are here. It is all clear, thorough delight to you. The lion is just from the African forest and the man in real peril; Mademoiselle Caroline is a sylph who never heard of red and white paint, and the clown's jokes are funny. I wouldn't take you behind the scenes for the world."

"I wouldn't go!" asserted I, stoutly. "It is twice as much fun to believe in everything. People are not obliged to go behind the scenes, as you call it."

"Very true, dear! We will keep on believing—you and I. Miss Virginia and Mr. Bradley may be infidels if they like. This is a pretty fair world, taken as a whole."

While she was speaking, the band clashed out, "Over the Water to Charlie!" and a magnificent figure ran fleetly down the slope from the side door into the vacant ring—a dazzling apparition clad in a white and silver costume fitting perfectly to the matchless limbs; a creature beautiful, tall and agile as a young god. After him rushed a superb coal-black horse. As it flew by he clutched the mane and sprang to its back, standing erect upon one foot, and they went like the wind around the circle.

"HORSE!" The ringing shout outswelled the applause of the lookers-on and the blare of the instruments.

A second black racer flashed to his place under the outstretched foot of the rider; his rein tossed upward

to his grasp, and the wild flight was not abated by so much as a single hoof-beat.

"HORSE!" A third, dusky and fleet as the others, joined the coursing pair.

A fourth shout, and a quartette dashed forward and around on the bound as one animal, held, guided and animated by the radiant Apollo. It was the sensation of the night, and with it the crowd lost its senses. Men arose on the benches and swung their hats and canes, shouting themselves hoarse; women beat their gloved hands excitedly and bent far forward to watch the glittering sprite and his bearers—the tripartite union of beauty, strength and speed; the music pealed high and triumphant to a final boom and crash as the horses sped out of the ring and back to their stables, leaving their master flushed, smiling and glorious in the arena, bowing and kissing his hand to the applauding multitude.

Not until that moment did I recognize him. Not until then did Harry Macon rise, throw up her arms, totter and fall like one shot in the heart. So unexpected was the action that no one near her could have foreseen it and moved in time to save her. The aisle between the banks of seats was fearfully precipitous, and the senseless form went directly down and forward. Before it touched the earth, the athlete gave a mighty bound that cleared ring and rope-fence, and caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER XV.

"And Sweetbrier missed the monkeys!"

Miss Harry had not risen at breakfast-time. I suspect, now, that she kept her bed as much to be out of the way of Mrs. Dabney's babblement as because she really felt jarred and weak. I was now perched beside her on the bed, and Miss Virginia sat a little way off.

I blushed furiously at her compassionate tone.

"As if I cared for them or anything else when you were sick! I could have gone back with Major Dabney and the boys if I liked!"

"Sweetbrier lost her heart to the handsome circus-rider who saved you from more serious damage than a few bruises and a general jar of the nerves," observed Miss Virginia playfully. "She kept close at his heels when he carried you out of the tent. Fifty people offered help, but he would let no one touch you until he laid you on the grass on the side-hill away from the crowd. Then he brought water and hartshorn and brandy and I don't know what else. I suppose that kind of people always keep restoratives at hand in case of accidents. When you came to he was standing a little way off, shining like a tall white angel in the moonlight. But when father wanted to thank him for his services he was nowhere to be seen. Wickham picked up a strange story about him last night. He says that Frederic Trevelyan is not his real name, but that he belongs to a good old English family, and does all this riding and leaping for amusement, and in order to see some other side of life than that usually presented to people of his rank—'for a spree', Wickham

"HE WOULD LET NO ONE TOUCH YOU, UNTIL HE HAD LAID YOU ON THE GRASS."—p. 240.

says. Father is going to see him to-day. He meant to offer him a reward in money for his presence of mind and timely aid, but if there is any foundation for this story, that wouldn't be proper, I suppose?"

"Certainly not!"

Miss Harry lay back on her pillows, gazing straight up at the ceiling. Her voice had a hollow, stifled sound, and she was very pale. For myself, I was in a secret quiver of relief and joy. This *was* the Prince, then! and in disguise, which made the adventure the more romantic. I could not utter my rapture, but I secured one of the cold hands and stroked it until it began to warm under the fervent caress. Presently she smiled languidly at me.

"What a comfort she is, Virginia! A born nurse, and already a woman in sense and tact!"

I was childish enough to begin to sob hysterically at this, and Miss Virginia took me away to another room to soothe me. She had ordered the carriage for a drive to Church Hill, where she had an errand, and would have me go with her. On the way back we called at a bookstore that I might select a new book for myself. A dapper little man waited on us, who was, she told me when we came out, one of the notable characters of Richmond. He was not young in the face, but his clustering chestnut hair was very thick and sleek, and had an odd look where it was parted; he lisped, and his feet glided and frisked from counter to shelves as if life were a perpetual minuet and he the leader of the set. He quoted Shakspeare three times, Byron and Moore each twice, Cowper once and alluded to Addison in ten minutes, although our quest was for children's books. While I was looking at "Riches without Wings," and Miss Edgeworth's "Moral Tales," he began talking to Miss Virginia of the event of the previous evening.

"I never *th*aw a more thrilling thene than Mith Macon'th fall and her retheue," he said. "Thome of the fellowth made a bet on the thpot ath to the ground covered by the leap, and meathured it afterward. Twenty-five feet upon my honor as a gentleman, and on the level! The thtory ith, on the thtreet to-day, that he is a dithtinguithed nobleman. He mutht have had conthiderable thircuth practithe if he wath born in the purple. Ah! 'we know what we are'—that ith, now and then one of uth doeth!—'but we know not what we thall be!' 'Mithery maketh uth acquainted with thtrange bedfellowth!'"

"Do you believe this story of the disguised nobleman?" asked Miss Virginia.

The little man shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in non-committal of his valuable opinion.

"Who can thay? It may be true. It may as eathily not be true. He ith a handthome fellow, with rather audathiously-developed muthelth, and altogether too tall for true thymmetry. But he ith a creditable thpecimen of mere animal perfection."

When we reached home, we ran up-stairs gleefully—I, to show my books (Miss Virginia had pressed both upon me); my companion to recount Phil D——'s criticism of Frederic Trevelyan's physique. Miss Harry was up and dressed, and with her was Mrs. Dabney, in a state of flutter impossible to describe. Harry's cheeks were full-blown carnations, although she feigned smiling composure; the elder lady had been crying so profusely and recently that the handkerchief she flourished in her declamation was still damp.

"Ah, here you are, my poor, dear child!" she burst out at sight of her step-daughter. "If I were to be led to the gallows the next second, with no hope of pardon except upon taking back what I said to your father, and

I *will* say that the Major, while he is an excellent man, with a fair share of delicacy of feeling, for a man of course, for if the truth were told, men have *not* the feelings of women, nor for the matter of that half the common sense their wives and daughters have, or he would never have made a social blunder like this, and a social blunder *looks* as bad as a real breach of the Commandments, the Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep His law, and there 's no telling where such a mistake may end, and the boys with their heads full of circuses and gentlemen in stockinet and spangles fitting like their skin to show the play of the muscles which I don't consider decent, and 'though obliged to submit to what 's done and can't be helped, because it 's a woman's duty to honor and obey her husband, I suppose, or St. Paul wouldn't have said it, and I 'm fairly sick all over with the thought of you, poor darlings, sitting down to table with one of the lower classes, for I 'm not to be fooled with their stuff about assumed names, the worse for him if it is so, with Frederic Trevelyan pasted on the fences at the street corners, and plain John Something-or-other on the visiting-card he gave your father, and our sweet Harry Macon has it in her hand this blessed minute, large as life, set him up with his humbugs, for I don't call myself proud, but the Dabneys and Archers and Carrs are as good blood as there is in Virginia, and I 've never been called to go through anything like this before—never! never! never!"

Even the gentle Virginia looked shocked as she stooped to take the card from Harry and read it aloud. It was a neat bit of pasteboard, inscribed:

"MR. JOHN WARING.
Fairwold Hall,
Hampshire, England."

"Do you mean, mother, that father has invited him to *dinner?*" she asked in a tone that expressed entire sympathy with the drift of the protest, the sentiments of which were irretrievably disjointed. "How did it happen?"

She—and eventually I—disentangled the truth from the medley that followed the question. Major Dabney had found Mr. Frederic Trevelyan at the Eagle Hotel, in which aristocratic quarters Van Amburg and a few leading members of his troupe had established themselves. The athlete was dressed like a gentleman and deported himself as one, winning so rapidly upon the Major's good-will and respect by a frank avowal of his incognito, the production of his visiting card and a grave confession that his connection with the circus company had been a blunder unworthy of a man of sense and breeding, that the listener, in a fit of admiration, gratitude and hospitality, asked him to partake of a family dinner that day, that Miss Macon might thank him in person for the service he had done her.

"There is no way out of it that I can see," mused Miss Virginia, aloud and reluctantly.

"Why should there be?"

It was Miss Harry who spoke. She had been biting her lip and pinching her hands during the talk of mother and daughter. Now she could restrain speech no longer, and it was many-edged.

"Why should there be? The man is well-born, well-bred, and a stranger in Richmond. His masquerade of the circus-rider is a harmless freak, the bad taste of which he admits. I am at a loss to see how it is more degrading than for Virginia gentlemen to ride their own horses on the race-course or in steeple-chases. He may be a degree less eligible to a seat at our tables than haberdashers' clerks or tobacco-factory overseers; but in a

republic even blue blood must make some concessions. Still, I cannot deny that the trifling circumstance of his having saved my life may bias my judgment somewhat. Forgive me! I ought not to have spoken!"

However this might be, she had ended the debate. Mrs. Dabney saw that she was angered or hurt, and hastened to make amends for her unintentional offense by declaring her willingness to eat and drink with "any white man" who had rendered them so signal a benefit. She imagined that his coming this once would hurt nobody. It was not like giving company in his honor; and when it was over she should be glad to remember that she had done all in her power for dear Harry's preserver. The servants would not know who "Mr. Waring" was, "even if they had seen him at the circus, as was more than probable, with all his paint washed off, and in a Christian coat and pantaloons; an English gentleman in plain broadcloth and no spangles and toggery, might dine at our table and nobody think of his ever having heard of that vulgar Trevelyan fellow standing on his head on the fences."

Not even the boys were taken into our confidence, and as they were not allowed to come to the first table, the danger of identification seemed slight.

Mr. John Waring was stately, and for awhile reserved in manner, positively overawing the fidgety hostess, who twice during the dinner accosted him as "Mr. Tre—Waring, I beg your pardon!"

The second time this happened he said gravely, "My inconsiderate conduct has made the mistake possible, madam! It is I who should apologize to you. It is just that I should pay dearly for my folly. Since yesterday I have felt how severe the punishment may be."

His eyes strayed, as by accident, to Miss Harry's as he said, "since yesterday." Had they lighted on me

I could not have been hotter and more confused. She had been unusually silent up to that minute, but now she took the duty of replying out of Mrs. Dabney's hands.

"The self-conviction of folly is, I fancy, the severest penalty the error will entail upon you," she said very gently. "This is always true with sensitive minds. Nothing others say of us hurts like the fault we are compelled to find with ourselves."

He looked gratefully humble.

"Thank you! What you say is more true than you can imagine."

In the parlor he ventured to approach and converse with her, standing for some time, then taking a chair near her. She beckoned me to a stool at her side, an instinctive device to avoid the semblance of a confidential dialogue. They talked easily, and on commonplace themes. The Waverly novels, the reflection of English manners and social customs in Virginian society, the early history of the state, the natural beauties of her capital, etc., were the topics. Miss Virginia was drawn into the discussion after a little, and Mrs. Dabney, sitting near the front windows with her tambour-frame, prattled incessantly in an undertone to her husband. He was drowsy after his dinner and two glasses of port, and longing for his pipe, but conventionality held him to the post of nominal entertainer. Had the visitor been a man of his own caste he would have left him to the ladies with an apology for the constraining power of a habit that withdrew him from the room for a season. As his social inferior, he was, while in his house, entitled to such scrupulous attention as might put him altogether at his ease. It is only with his equals that the thoroughbred takes liberties.

It was the Major who proposed music, probably in

the hope that he might slip out unchallenged, and, without incivility, absent himself long enough to snatch a dozen whiffs. He called on Miss Harry for a song, and she played, instead, a couple of waltzes and a march, alleging that the fall of the night before had "shaken her voice to pieces."

"Had you ever fainted until then?" inquired Mr. Waring, in a matter-of-fact way.

He was standing at the end of the piano, and had a full view of her countenance. From my seat behind her I saw the scarlet tide stream over her neck and steep the small ears.

"No!" she said curtly. "Virginia! I will play the accompaniment if you will sing 'The harp that once through Tara's halls.'"

A duet succeeded to the song, and Mrs. Dabney spoke up with agreeable intent. The Major had stolen away, and she spurred herself on to cover his retreat.

"Mr. Waring! you have a singing face! I can always almost tell by looking at a person whether they sing or not, and by their voice in speaking, you know; and yours is so very pleasant I 'm just as sure as if I had heard you that you are a beautiful singer, and maybe play, too, for you foreign gentlemen are so accomplished, and it is a burning sin and shame that our young men are so remiss in cultivating such things; I am sure they would be more domestic if they would."

"I did play and sing once," confessed the Englishman. "When I was 'domestic,' and lived at home with my sisters, who were really fine performers. Excuse the personal allusion, Miss Dabney, but your voice reminds me of my sister Eleanor's. She is the younger of the two. I have seldom touched a piano during the half year I have spent in America—the organ not once. It may shock you, Mrs. Dabney"—with a smiling bow

in her direction—"to learn that I was the organist in our parish church. My uncle is the rector, and my father gave the instrument when I was a lad of sixteen. I could not bear to have other hands than mine touch it."

What his touch was we had an opportunity of judging when, yielding courteously to persuasion, with no affectation of unwillingness, but rather as if tempted by the sight of keys and music, he sat down to the piano. He played boldly and with fine taste. Miss Virginia said, in after days, that his musical skill did more than all other proofs to convince her that his tales of John Waring and Fairwold Hall were not a myth. The Major shortly reappeared, wide awake and delighted, drew near the piano, and applauded vociferously the stirring march that ended with the "Marseillaise," rendered magnificently. Mrs. Dabney clapped her hands effusively at the success of her maneuver—the verification of her suspicions.

"The song! Now for the song!" she cried.

The boys were peeping through the crack of the half-open door, and I caught glimpses of the servants hovering about hall and staircase. The piano had never spoken and thundered thus before in that house. It was the glad shout of unbound Ariel, glorying in his strength. All were excited and eager for more.

"Do you know Shelley?" the musician asked of Miss Harry, after a little thoughtful preluding.

She had, involuntarily, approached the instrument while he played. Her sensitive face was a lovely study of color and expression.

"Very slightly. I have read his 'Skylark,' of course."

"His songs are comparatively little known, but they are models of their kind. My father and he were friends in their youth. We are more familiar with his poems on that account than we would otherwise have

been. 'The Fugitives' used to be a favorite with us at home. I may remember it. I ought never to forget it."

He played a symphony in which the roaring of the winds warred with the tumult of sea-waves, the lightnings gleamed blue on hissing hail. Then his voice arose full and grand—a voice that in melody and compass carried feeling by storm and swept criticism out of the field. His articulation was singularly distinct. We did not lose a word of the descriptive ballad:

"'The waters are flashing,
The white hail is dashing,
The lightnings are glancing,
The hoar-spray is dancing—
Away!'"

We put off from shore in the boat with the pale helmsman and the fleeing lovers:

"'And from isle, tower and rock
The blue beacon-cloud broke,
Though dumb in the blast,
The red cannon flashed fast
From the ice.'"

Into the tempest and glare flowed a slender minor strain of unearthly sweetness — a stealing sun-ray through the black heart of the cloud. Before it blast and surges rolled away into horizon mutterings. The voice took up the story in a passionate undertone:

"'"And fear'st thou?" "And fear'st *thou?*"
And seest thou—and hear'st thou?
And drive we not free
O'er the terrible sea—
I and thou?

"'One boat-cloak doth cover
The loved and the lover—
Their blood beats one measure,
They murmur proud pleasure,
Soft and low,

"'While 'round the lashed ocean,
Like mountains in motion,
Is withdrawn and uplifted,
Sunk, shattered and shifted
To and fro.'"

To the ineffable tenderness of the recitative, the dreamy lingering upon the melodious measure of verse and music, succeeded heroic narration:

"'In the court of the fortress,
Beside the pale portress,
Like a bloodhound well beaten,
The bridegroom stands, eaten
By shame.

"'On the topmost watch-turret,
As a death-boding spirit,
Stands the gray tyrant-father—
To his voice the mad weather
Seems tame;

"'And with curses as wild
As e'er cling to child,
He devotes to the blast
The best, loveliest and last
Of his name!'"

There were specks like dew on the Major's grizzled lashes. He laughed outright, but brokenly, as the story was finished.

"But he got her, in spite of bridegroom and father! The young folks got away safe and sound! By George! I never heard anything finer in my life! I could see it all—the storm and the courtship in the boat, and the pair of scoundrels gnashing their teeth on the tower! My dear sir," dropping a heavy hand on the guest's shoulder, "you have given us a rare treat—a wonderful treat! And let me say that if the fellow in the boat said those pretty things to the lady as *you* sang them, she could not have stayed behind! Not to save her life, sir! human nature and woman nature being what

it is! Who wrote it did you say? Shelley? Never heard of him that I recollect, but he is no fool of a song-writer. Virginia, my dear, put his name down for me, will you? Do you know anything else of his, Mr. Waring?"

"Something sentimental, please, Mr. Waring?" quavered Mrs. Dabney's drawl. "I know you would sing love-songs be-*yu*-tifully if the truth were told. Did Mr. Shelby ever write any love-songs? I dote upon love-songs, if I am an old married woman. I always cry my eyes out over 'Highland Mary' and 'Auld Robin Gray' and 'Lord Ullin's Daughter,' the song you have just sung so delightfully and thrown us all into ecstacies with, I am sure, for nobody can enjoy really good music more than we, and you are certainly a musical genius, Mr. Waring, reminds me of 'Lord Ullin's Daughter,' the words, I mean, for there 's no manner of comparison between the music of the two, and a man with such melancholy eyes as yours and *such* a voice ought to be able to just break our hearts with a love-song."

Mr. Waring laughed a little in a perfectly well-bred way, dropping the bepraised eyes to his fingers that still lay on the keys.

"I doubt if I could recall a sentimental ballad, madam. It has been a long time since I heard or sang one."

He turned again to Miss Harry. She had taken a seat at an easier conversational angle to the piano than that occupied by either of the other ladies. It was but natural that he should refer to her in his perplexity.

"There is a little serenade of Shelley's, beginning, 'I arise from dreams of thee.' Have you ever heard it?"

"Never. Cannot you sing it?"

"Do! do!" clucked Mrs. Dabney, persuasively. "It

must be just perfectly fascinating. I am devoted to love-songs; they can't be too loving for me; the lovinger the sweeter, according to my notion."

The accompaniment of the "Serenade" was a mere nothing, the touch of a chord here and there, as one might sweep his finger over guitar-strings; but no more was needed. I think Harry Macon's heart left the keeping of will and reason forever, while that song flowed into her ears. Her perceptive powers were never clear afterward. It wrought more potently upon affections and judgment than did ever philtre or love-spell in the age when witches gave and maidens sought such. If it were poison it was a delicious draught as this man administered it, his glorious eyes like brown opals with throbbing light, his voice impassioned, supplicating—and at the last, faint with the burden of a love not to be conveyed in speech or sound:

"'I arise from dreams of thee,
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright.
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me—who knows how?—
To thy chamber-window, sweet!

"'The wandering airs, they faint,
On the dark, the silent stream,—
The roses' odors fail,
Like sweet thoughts in a dream.
The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
Oh, belovéd as thou art!'"

I cannot more aptly describe the strange change that swept over Miss Harry's figure and face as the line I have italicized was uttered than by saying that it was like the quiver and play, first, of white, then of roseate

lambent flame in which she swayed and glowed. Her eyes closed for a second, and opened to their widest, in fascinated intentness of gaze that met the rapt look of the singer. Eyes questioned and eyes replied, before the few chords of the interlude ceased to vibrate:

"'Oh, lift me from the grass!
I die, I faint, I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale!
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast.
Oh, press it close to thine again,
Where it will break at last!'"

The sorcerer arose, crossed over to Mrs. Dabney and made his adieux, with thanks for her "great kindness to an undeserving stranger in a strange land."

"Oh, but look here!" cried the Major, taken aback by the sudden movement. "You ain't going to leave us this way, you know! You 'll be in town some days yet, I hope. I mean that it ain't likely that the—ah—ah—"

Mr. Waring covered the awkward pause, at which he smiled, and the rest were mortified.

There was even a touch of archness in his amusement, repressed by courtesy, but his voice was gravely respectful.

"The company moves westward to-morrow. I have a furlough of two weeks. I had thought—I may say it to you, Major Dabney, whose treatment of me has been so noble in its freedom from prejudice and patronage—that I have hopes of shortly effecting a dissolution of my relations with my present associates. In short—I mean to break my contract with the circus company. My false position has grown very irksome of late."

The Major clapped him on the shoulder again.

"Of course it has! How could it be otherwise?

You 've had your frolic, and now for a return to your real self and civilization! You are quite right, my dear sir—quite right! And let me say that I hope you 'll prolong your stay in Richmond indefinitely, and examine our institutions and all that, you know, and let us see as much of you as possible and convenient to yourself. By George! I honor your honesty and straightforwardness, sir! Be blamed if I don't! As for prejudice and patronage and gossip, I don't care a Continental blank for all three!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"I AM sure that father is boring Mr. Waring with his endless genealogies," said Miss Virginia, quitting the window where she and Mr. Bradley had been standing in the rainy twilight. "Sweetbrier, go into the study and see if I left 'Thomson's Seasons' on the table—there 's a darling!"

Obediently, but less cheerfully than I usually fulfilled her behests, I repaired to the Major's den. He had lighted a candle and raised it high in one hand toward the family coat-of-arms over the mantel. In the other he held the bowl of his pipe, and pointed with the long handle while discoursing:

"The first record we have of the Dabney family is on the roll of Battle Abbey, erected by William the Conqueror at Hastings when he defeated Harold. Masses were sung for the souls of the knights and squires who fell there. One of the knights is 'D'Aubenay,' and among the squires is another 'D'Aubenay.' Baron

'D'Aubigny' was one of the bold, true men set to watch tricky King John, lest he might violate Magna Charta. My immediate ancestors, John and Cornelius 'Dabnée' (it is thus spelled in the old vestry-book of New Kent County), fled from France to Wales after the revocation of the Edict of Nantz, thence emigrated to America. They were among the Huguenots who settled on the lower Pamunkey— My dear Miss Judith, can I assist you in your search ?"

I was fumbling among the newspapers, tobacco-boxes, twine, corks, pipes and account-books on the table in the centre of the room.

"Miss Virginia sent me to look for 'Thomson's Seasons,' sir," I apologized diffidently.

"Ah !" setting down the candle. "Another more considerable body of refugees settled on the south side of James River, near the deserted capital of the Manocan tribe, now perverted into 'Mannakin Town.' The Colonial House of Burgesses, held 'at his majestye's royall colledge of William and Mary,' December 5th, 1700, established the settlement as 'King William's Parish,' exempting 'said French refugees' from taxation for seven years. Among these were the Michaux —still resident on the original grant—the Flournoys, Soublettes (now Subletts), the Maurys— Never mind the almanac, my dear," as I stooped to pick it up. "Can't you find the book ?"

I colored all over. It seemed sacrilegious to break twice the continuity of so learned a disquisition. Mr. Waring came forward while the Major helped me to tumble over the tobacco-and-coal-dusty miscellany.

"I saw that volume in the parlor this evening," said the Englishman respectfully. "I fancy that I can put my hand on it at once. Will you excuse me, Major Dabney, but allow me to return after a while and hear

the rest of the history you have begun? It is deeply interesting."

"I am sorry, sir," faltered I, as the guest disappeared and I caught the blank look on the dear, kind face of the genealogist.

"Don't speak of it, my child—don't speak of it! It is time I had my smoke, and I am apt to forget that old people make themselves tiresome with their hobbies."

He let me fill his pipe and light it with a twisted paper kindled at the grate, puffed away the shade of chagrin with the first blue curl of smoke, like the sound-tempered philosopher he was. I placed a stool under his gouty foot, and offered the freshest of the newspapers as a substitute for the fascinating visitor, uneasily trying to atone for my complicity in his daughter's maneuver. Much as I admired the pretty adroitness with which she avoided giving present pain and offense, my Summerfield honesty revolted occasionally at the palpable double-dealing I could not but espy. She was tactful and a peace-lover, and had to deal with incongruous elements. Furthermore, she was affectionate and tender-hearted. In shrinking from the sight of suffering, she sometimes recoiled too far. This is the excuse reason and heart now combine to make for what then distressed and baffled me.

She was at the piano when I went back to the parlor, playing softly one plaintive air after another, Mr. Bradley breathing a flute accompaniment, deliciously and delicately sweet, although scarcely louder than the rain-muffled wind plaining disquietly at sash and in chimney. The two young men had dined with us, and the close of the short, wet afternoon found both lingering in the hospitable mansion. It was the third of such March days as strike with dismay spring visitors to Richmond. There had not been a rift in the sagging

pall of cloud from sunrise to sunset. Brick sidewalks and cobble-stone pavements were glazed by sheets of rain that succeeding floods did not give time to run off. The muddy street into which Miss Harry, seated on the broad window-bench, seemed to gaze, was almost deserted. The oil-lamps, accentuating the darkness of business thoroughfares, were not visible from our quarter of the town. The dots and dashes of flickering yellow one saw through mist and rain were in the windows of private dwellings. Once in a great while a figure tramped by, furnished with umbrella and lantern. I coiled myself up in another window to watch idly for these, to listen to the music, and to dream out the stories that made one long, eventful romance of my sober-tinted child-life.

The widening area of fire-glow, the outermost edge of which struck glints from the silver keys of Mr. Bradley's flute, and brushed the sheeny waves of the pianist's hair; the monotonous plash of the rain on the panes; the proximity of the pair who occupied the embrasure of the window nearest to me; the intermittent drifts of earnest-voiced talk blent with the melody of "Oft in the Stilly Night," "Has Sorrow Thy Young Days Shaded?" and "Byron's Farewell," were conditions to the full enjoyment of twilight revery.

Mr. Waring's furlough would be over in two days. With the tact that seldom failed him, he had not appeared abroad with the Dabneys, or done anything else that could attract public attention to his growing intimacy in the family. Twice, when other visitors had called while he was in the parlor, he had quietly withdrawn to the Major's study, and talked with him until the coast was clear. With Mr. Bradley he made friends within twenty-four hours after his first visit to the house. They walked and drove together every fair day,

and the quick-witted tutor was apparently as much captivated by his new acquaintance as was the whole-souled Major. Both regarded the episode of his introduction to our domestic circle as a romantic incident, the consequences of which would extend no farther than the limits of his sojourn in the city, unless, in the event of the prodigal's return to his English home, the news should reach his trans-Atlantic friends and be a staple of family gossip in coming years. That he talked much with Miss Harry went for nothing with people accustomed to see her the recipient of admiring attention from every man who approached her. She was a belle in town, as in country, and tokens of the fact were every day arriving in the shape of graceful trifles—philopena gifts of books and bon-bons, and votive offerings of flowers. Twice I had seen her extract from the hearts of bouquets brought up by Apphia to her room twisted billets, which she reserved for private perusal. One morning the maid returned from an outdoor errand with a parcel done up in silver paper and gave it to her young mistress, without observing my presence. Instinctively I kept my eyes riveted on my book, apparently regardless of the violet scent that filled the chamber, until Miss Harry spoke:

"See what I have, Little Discretion!"

It was a dainty white satin box, clamped at the corners with gilded ornaments, and full of violets. A note had lain upon them, and she still held it in her hand. As I praised and wondered at the quantity and freshness of the flowers, she laid her cheek on them, her bright smile chastened into infinite content. I stood by, mute and awed, my heart overflowing with sympathy.

Apphia broke in upon the eloquent silence sharply, even for a privileged and spoiled servant.

"'Tain't safe to tell child'en sech things, Miss Harry!

They mean well enough, but they can't be expected to understand."

"I can trust Judith!" meeting my hurt look with one of affectionate reassurance. "She will not speak until I give her leave to do so. She knows I am doing nothing to be ashamed of—nothing I shall not be glad to have the world know by-and-by. But I won't be talked about and marveled at until the time comes. Oh, yes!"—fondling my flushed face and speaking very softly—"Judith quite understands! Better—so much better—than most grown people would!"

It was child-nature to be immensely elated by the confidence reposed in me. Albeit utterly unsophisticated in intrigue, discretion was, as I have already said, a lesson conned from my earliest recollection. I did not suspect that there was more impropriety in Miss Harry's reception of *billet-doux* from the elect lord of her dream than in Uncle Archie's careful conservation of the secret of his love for Virginia Dabney. I was the flattered recipient of the confidence of both, and would have had my tongue plucked out by the roots sooner than betray either.

Painted upon the background of the rainy darkness toward which I kept my face resolutely turned, lest I might see some gesture or penetrate the meaning of some word not meant for others' senses, I beheld the American girl the honored mistress of Fairwold Hall, the idolized wife of the man made for her and led over ocean and land and the Alps of social prejudice to her feet. I arranged the wedding at Hunter's Rest, with Aunt Maria and Miss Virginia among the white-robed troop of bridesmaids, Uncle Archie and Mr. Bradley as groomsmen, a shading of disappointed suitors relieving the almost too-bright vision of the princely pair and their rejoicing train. I saw my hitherto insignifi-

cant self lauded as a pattern of intelligent prudence, the ally of the lovers, the petted favorite of the nuptial day. Perhaps—most probably—they would invite me to visit them in the ancestral halls of the Warings. Why might not Uncle Archie include an ocean voyage and Fairwold Hall in his wedding journey, and I accompany the happy couple?

Between rain, piano and preoccupation of thought, none of us heard the door-bell or the bustle of arrival in the hall. I was hurled back from my dream-world with a shock that produced temporary concussion of the brain, by the apparition—in the fullest glare of the light that had gradually filled the room from the igniting coals—of Uncle Archie and Sidney Macon.

I could not stir, or determine whether the feet, numbed by long sitting upon them, and the eyes, filmed by the abrupt change from the stare into the blackening night to the ruddy illumination within, really belonged to myself or not, until Uncle Archie kissed me with the familiar—

"Well, little woman! how goes it?"

I clung to him when he sat down and began to tell that some business connected with tobacco crop and sales had called them to the city. In the middle of the explanation the Major hobbled in upon the gouty leg that was stiff in wet weather—and a minute later Mrs. Dabney, pink cap-strings flying and tongue wabbling more loosely than usual on the pivotal point of common sense, in the excitement of meeting dear Mr. Read and darling Harry's brother, and there certainly was such a strong family likeness that she would have known him anywhere—if she had met him at Rockett's, or say, the great Chinese Wall, she would have run right straight up to him and said, "How do you do, Mr. Macon?"

By the time we were seated, and the ceremony of

presentation was accomplished, and Mrs. Dabney's prattle-wheel was slowing up preparatory to as full a stop as she ever made, it began to dawn on me, and, I fancy, on others, that Sidney Macon's mien was ominous of trouble. He was habitually grave, but to-night he looked as inclement as the weather. In opposition to the conventional courtesy prevalent among Virginian gentlemen, he did not shake hands with Mr. Waring when presented to him by Miss Virginia, nor had he smiled at Mrs. Dabney's welcome. The butler brought in lamps and revealed the dark face, grim to ferocity, the deep-set eyes like gleaming embers that a breath might excite into flame. Miss Harry pushed a chair forward, and Mr. Waring, anticipating her intention, set it near her brother's for her before saying :

"I have added another to the list of my trespasses on your hospitality, Mrs. Dabney. I ought to have taken my leave much earlier than this. But your always-pleasant home is doubly tempting on such an evening."

He delivered the little speech distinctly, making his slight English drawl and upward inflections rather more apparent than was common with him. Sidney did not rise, but leaned back in his chair, aggressively uncivil, his gaze settled on the superbly-handsome lineaments in angry scorn, not to be ignored by the sister familiar with his ordinary behavior.

Her eyes kindled, her lip curled resolutely. She took a step forward to meet Mr. Waring, as he made his bow to her—put out her hand.

"We shall see you again very soon, I hope!" articulating as clearly as he had done. "I want you to know my brother. I might say, with truth, both of my brothers!" shedding milder light upon Uncle Archie, who stood by her.

Tone and manner, if not words, were unequivocal.

A strange shock and silence fell upon the little company at the quietly significant address. I saw Miss Virginia change color and clasp her hands convulsively, Mr. Bradley's start and piercing glance at Miss Harry. Uncle Archie bowed silently—to her, not to him for whom she bespoke his good-will. Sidney sat motionless and glowered wrathfully at the three. Mr. Waring bent low over the hand shut fast and warm in his.

"I am honored beyond my powers of expression by the hope and the wish! Good-night!"

He stepped backward to the door with courtly dexterity; on the threshold, swept a magnificent general obeisance to the rest of the group, and was gone.

Sidney started up hastily, spoke harshly:

"Harry! I want to have a few minutes' talk with you!"

"As you please!" she rejoined, undauntedly. To Mrs. Dabney, she said, with winning politeness, "May we go into your sitting-room?"

On receiving a frightened, therefore a tolerably coherent reply, she led the way across the hall.

Before bed-time, we all knew what was the result of the conference.

At the Columbian Hotel, where the travelers halted to put up their horses and exchange their damp garments for dry, Sidney had met his friend Ronald Craig, Miss Harry's oft-discarded suitor. He had been in town several days, paid a diurnal call to his obdurate idol, twice encountered Mr. Waring, and uneasy at what he fancied he detected, made it his business to find out who the obnoxious stranger was. Chancing to stumble upon Sidney as the latter was following a waiter to his room within ten minutes after his arrival, he fastened himself upon him and besought an interview. In the course of his rapid toilet Sidney heard that which

made him forget cold, wet, hunger and fatigue. He was collected enough to make due allowance for the jealous alarms of the unsuccessful wooer and his never-acute brain, but he gleaned from the dialogue one and a most disagreeable truth.

His sister was a guest in a house where a worse than nobody—a common circus-rider—was received as the equal of a family so simple as to be duped by his poor pretense of aristocratic lineage and breeding. She had sat at the same board with him, conversed with him with apparent satisfaction, and hearkened delightedly to his playing and singing. Sidney could not forbear allusion to his discovery as he and Uncle Archie walked up town and was laughed at for his indignation.

"I know Miss Harry better than to insult her by such suspicions as the fear lest she should lower her dignity by familiar association with the person you describe," said Harry's fast friend, picking his way over the puddles and miry crossings. "Major Dabney is a thorough gentleman. His daughter's friend would be as carefully protected from undesirable acquaintances as his own child. Depend upon it, poor Ronald has been hoaxed, or is misled by his own dreads. It is more like your sister to feign preference for another man in order to get rid of *his* importunities than to form an attachment for a nameless adventurer."

The unshuttered parlor-windows were crimson beacons of cheer to them from the instant they caught sight of the house. When they were at the gate of the narrow front-yard the interior of the room was a Rembrandt picture in the light from the blazing coals in the grate. Both recognized one of the figures in the striking tableaux framed by the illuminated window—Harry's lissome figure and high-bred profile, and leaning toward her a man evidently earnest in talk. Both

saw him raise her hand to his lips in a passionate pressure unchecked, and so far as could be judged from the expression of the beautiful head, unrebuked. It was not a scene for a man like Sidney Macon to discuss with his dearest friend. Neither uttered a word until Sidney's deep voice inquired of the servant who answered his ring, if "the ladies and Major Dabney were at home?"

His intemperate remonstrance with his sister was met by an avowal that stung him into a frenzy of astonishment and wrath. The disreputable adventurer had that very hour declared his love for her and received a favorable reply. Their mutual devotion dated from the moment of their first meeting. Each had dreamed of the other before they had ever looked upon one another's faces. She would be willing to marry him without other testimonials to his worth and character than she already possessed. The proposition to procure credentials from England was his voluntary suggestion.

The stormy scene ensuing upon the astounding disclosure was ended by Sidney's departure from the house without the slightest form of leave-taking. Those left in the parlor heard his tramp along the hall, the violent reverberation of the closing door, and had barely time to exchange alarmed glances when Harry walked into the apartment, head high, and face like marble in color and steadfastness.

"My brother has gone, Mrs. Dabney!" she began with haughty incisiveness that prepared her auditors for a momentous announcement. "He was too much excited to venture to say 'Good-evening,' or even to remember the commonest forms of courtesy. He sees fit to be very angry with me because I am engaged to be married to Mr. Waring!"

Then, as a gasp from Mrs. Dabney and a growl from

the Major severed the fine, strong thread of her speech —"Not that his opposition, or that of the whole Macon clan, combined with the anathemas of Christendom, would alter one jot or one tittle of my resolution. If John Waring lives, and I live, I shall become his wife whenever he sees best to claim me—so help me—God!" The hand lifted in the energy of the declaration fell on the great Bible lying on the centre-table, and rested there.

Mrs. Dabney promptly did all that could be expected of her on the occasion by going into strong hysterics. Her sobbings, pantings, struggles and suffocations in the arms of the Major and Uncle Archie while they carried her to her chamber, her kicks against the wall and clutchings at the banisters of the stairs, the shrieks of wild laughter that pierced the ceiling when the removal was accomplished, were terrific to a child who had never so much as heard of nervous paroxysms and fashionable "vapors." I slunk away behind a window-curtain, and cried big, honest tears of distressful compassion, with none to see or dry them.

"I had better go," Mr. Bradley said aside to Miss Virginia.

She stayed him by a gesture, then sank upon an ottoman, and wept silently, her face buried in her handkerchief. Harry stood like a statue of Resolve when Uncle Archie returned to us. He went directly up to her, laid his hand on that pressed hard on the Bible-lid.

"None of us are quite calm enough for argument tonight," he said, very gravely and very kindly. "We are taken by surprise, and must think over what we have heard before we are fit to decide as to the merits of the case you submit to us. You ought not to need to be told that the one desire of us all is for your happiness. That, if we could congratulate you intelligently and sincerely, we would do it now and gladly."

Her chin trembled, but the closer compression of the lips, the unblenching eye told how far she was from yielding.

"I have had a foretaste of friendly congratulations in Sidney's fraternal comments upon what I told him!" was the curt rejoinder.

"Try to think kindly of the brother who loves you best of living things!" went on the serious tones. "By to-morrow he may be more reasonable."

"Why not add, 'And so may you?' I read it in your face. Don't delude yourself into the belief that I will ever swerve. I have sworn unto the Lord and will not go back!"

"I have not asked you to retract one word. If I had prophesied that to-morrow would find you reasonable, I should have spoken out my own belief. You are right there. When have you been unreasonable to *me?*"

He was smiling—the frank, genial gleam that always met her sallies, as she raised her eyes suddenly to his—brotherly and compassionate of her present pain, with no subtler intent than to assuage this. The rigid face-lines broke up in an answering smile.

"If all men were like you—" she began impatiently.

He finished the sentence laughingly:

"You would have a host of true friends, and never hesitate to say 'No!' to any of them who presumed to be more than friendly!"

"I meant no such thing! The woman who hesitates to intrust her happiness to your keeping is a benighted imbecile! One proof of this is that I dare declare that to your face without fear of a gallant reply. What I began to say was that if all men were like you, it would be easier for us to act like reasonable beings. There would be some hope of just and merciful treatment at the hands of our masters. But, as you say,

discussion of the news I have been forced to communicate more abruptly than is timely or delicate, had better be deferred until to-morrow. Excuse me for a little while, please, all of you! I have been flayed alive, and the smart is still fresh!"

Mrs. Dabney was unable to appear at supper. The perturbed Major had hauled Uncle Archie off to the study as soon as he could leave his distraught spouse, and kept him there until the meal was announced. Mr. Bradley and Miss Virginia talked long and confidentially over the parlor fire. I, too low and miserable to rest quietly, roamed about passages and staircase, conscious that there was no place for me and for my dashed dreams anywhere.

At the tinkle of the tea-bell Miss Virginia came into the hall and called me from my perch on the first landing. Her tender heart melted at sight of my disordered appearance. The stairs were bleak and draughty; my skin was rough with cold, my forehead indented by leaning on the banisters, and my teeth chattered nervously. She kissed me, chafed my hands and smoothed my tousled hair.

"Poor little Sweetbrier! the sharp winds shake you terribly—don't they? Never mind, dear! Everything always does come right at last, you know. Run up and see if Miss Harry wants any supper—won't you? She is never cross or short with *you!*"

At Miss Harry's door I met Apphia, coming out, a letter in her hand. Her mistress was brushing her hair preparatory to answering the bell.

"Come in, pet!" she said, gayly. "You 'll stand by me, whatever comes. It 's in the blood, I think. Don't let them persuade you that I ought to be turned into the street and trodden under foot."

"Nobody could!" replied I, defiantly. "And, Miss

Harry"—eager to tender my one sweet crumb of comfort—"Miss Virginia told me just now that everything would come out right at last."

She caught my arms, swung me around the room in a wild waltz. She was like one "fey" under the commingling excitements of the hour.

"Come right!" she cried. "How can anything go wrong in this great, glorious world of ours? Now for a race to the parlor door!"

Down stairs she was the life of the party.

"Why shouldn't I want my supper, and eat it with good appetite and conscience?" she answered Miss Virginia's expressed satisfaction at her appearance among them. "I have done nothing that needs to be repented of in sackcloth and ashes; have no idea of fasting, or supping on dry bread soaked in salty tears. Sid will feel better when he has broken his fast, be quite humane and decent after a night's rest. Being a rational creature he will comprehend the folly of contending with Fate—and with a woman who has made up her mind!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SIDNEY MACON could not alter the bent of his sister's will. He could, and he did, carry out his decision that she should go home with him when the business that had brought him to Richmond was finished.

"The naughty child will be no gooder in country than in town," she informed him, with the audacious vivacity she had maintained in his presence since the close of their one hot, bitter altercation. "Not that I mind being put into the corner and lectured by underlings. It amounts to nothing in the end. I appeal unto Cæsar. When did the blessed autocrat of Hunter's Rest refuse me anything?"

The Major had spent a whole forenoon writing a letter of unparalleled proportions to his ancient crony. Mr. Waring, as nobody but his betrothed knew at the time, had penned a formal petition to her father for the honor of Miss Harriet Macon's hand. Mrs. Dabney was never seen during the three days that remained of our visit, without a damp handkerchief in her fingers, usually at her eyes. The tip of her thin nose was a polished red, and her wobbling whine over the "sad, sad, sad affair," her "who-would-have-thought-its?" and incessant "I call all to witness that I was opposed to bringing the man inside of Christian doors," went far, I suspect, toward reconciling Harry to the return home in disgrace.

On the afternoon of the second day after the revelation that had shaken the peaceful household to the foundation-stone, she invited me to pay a farewell visit

to McGovern's Garden. The conservatories and well-tended flower-beds of the only florist of note in Richmond were, in blossom seasons, a much-affected resort with the better classes of young people. The broad, central alley, bordered by roses, was called "Flirtation Walk." The narrow aisles of the green-house had been the scene of gallant and loving passages innumerable. To me—who had seen beside these no conservatory except the small building at Hunter's Rest, which was the solace of sickly Diana's life—McGovern's modest glass-houses were vast and bewitching.

My heart sank in disappointment when on the front door-step we met Uncle Archie and Sidney Macon.

"Where are you going?" demanded the latter sternly.

"To McGovern's, to fill the memorandum Di sent by you. Perhaps you prefer to do it yourself?"

She showed the folded paper on the palm of her hand, her smile as ingenuous as a baby's.

"You know I can't tell a rose from a potato-flower," (her cool hardihood was a continual irritation, and his rasping tone betrayed it); "but I had better go with you."

She stood perfectly still, her face as open as the sky.

"Why, may I ask? The danger of elopement is not so imminent that you need play watch-dog *all* the time. Or is this a fresh proof of the 'brotherly love' that has 'continued' so virulently for two days past?"

"Don't be foolish, Sidney!" Uncle Archie put his arm within that of his friend. "Distrust is always unkind. Sometimes it is an insult. Miss Harry, may I commission you to select some seeds and roots for Maria's flower-garden?" He slipped a bank-note into her hand. "And a tea-rose for Judith. I heard her wishing for one last winter."

Honest scarlet stained a face that was no longer proud. The smile of flippant defiance passed like a distorted gleam uglier than shadow. She spoke very fast, looking straight at him:

"Before you let Judith go with me, you ought to know that I expect to meet Mr. Waring at the Garden. Since he cannot visit me here, I must say 'Good-by'—*not* 'Farewell,' mind you!—to him somewhere. If you would rather guard her from the contamination of appearing in public with me in such circumstances, you have only to speak the word. I wouldn't have mentioned it, but you trusted me!"

"If you will allow me, I will accompany you both!" was the unexpected rejoinder. "Please make my excuses to Mrs. Dabney and Miss Virginia, Sidney!"

We were in the street before anything more was said. He had offered his arm, and Miss Harry had taken it.

"You know it will make no difference!" she interjected presently.

"I understand that perfectly."

"You disapprove of the whole proceeding?"

"The question is too general."

She cast aside the dry laconicism so foreign to their usual style of converse.

"You blame me for promising to marry the man to whom I have given my whole heart—for whom I have waited through the years that bring dozens of fancies to most girls—one who has not his peer among his fellows! He is noble by birth and princely in nature, rich in gifts of mind and person. Because I recognize my king under a disguise no meaner than other kings have assumed that they might see the world to advantage, and be loved for themselves instead of for wealth and station, I am told that I have forfeited all claim to respect, degraded my womanhood, deserved to lose the

love of family and friends; that I have been bold, unmaidenly—"

The last word choked the channel of utterance.

"You overheat your imagination by dwelling upon the angry exaggerations of other people," answered Uncle Archie quietly. "Nobody thinks that you have done one of these dreadful things. If Mr. Waring be what you represent, you have not a friend who would not approve your choice. If your position were that of any other woman you know, your good sense would commend the decision of her relatives to wait for proof that her new acquaintance is a man of good family and character. There is the whole matter in a dozen words! When Mr. Waring comes to Hunter's Rest with satisfactory certificates to prove that he is what he pretends to be, and is turned away, it will be time enough for you to complain that he and you are ill-used."

"*Then*"—eagerly—"you will keep your promise of intercession? will use your influence with Papa?"

"I will!"

She was battling with softer emotions than had spoken in her former appeal—began a sentence, and stopped to control her voice.

"Thank Heaven, that I have one true friend! My first sorrow is a sorely heavy one, Mr. Read. I laughed outright last night when Major Dabney ended his hour's expostulations, but it was because I was ready to cry. I felt that he meant to be kind. I was sorry that I had caused him distress, but he had seasoned his talk with abuse of a man every way his superior, blamed himself for allowing him to enter his house, and much more of the same sort—and worse. I told him not to trouble his conscience on that score—that we had met twice before he introduced Mr. Waring to me, and already loved one another better than *he* could imagine

people ever loving in any circumstances. With that, I marched out of the room without farther explanation."

"That was unjust to you, uncandid to a good, warm-hearted gentleman, whose one fault in this affair has been a too-ready hospitality, and a belief that others are as honest as himself."

I thought the bold reproof would anger her, but she only replied, after the struggle of a second, "I will beg his pardon, if you think best."

"I do think it best that you should not willfully throw away respect and good-will. Here is the garden, and I see that Mr. Waring is waiting. If you will trust me, I will, with pleasure, attend to your sister's memorandum and wait for you at the gate."

She consigned the paper to him with a look of affectionate gratitude it was well her lover was not near enough to see. Few men would have read it aright. Fewer would have been generous enough to brook it had their claims upon her been strong and confessed. Then she went slowly down the long alley, from the far end of which a tall figure advanced to meet her. I watched them in a maze of romanceful enjoyment and intense misgivings. Uncle Archie's straightforward common sense had cleared my perceptions and steadied my judgment measurably. If this man were not an impostor there must be means of proving it. If he could not produce these, father, brother and friends were more than justified in refusing to sanction his suit of their darling.

But how handsome he was! how graceful the reverence with which he bent toward her, his kingly head bared in the sunlight!

"Don't you think he is a good man, Uncle Archie?" queried I, tentatively, as we entered the green-house.

"I do not know him well enough to judge, nor to talk about him yet, little girl!"

Which I rightly construed into a recommendation to me to hold my peace.

The west wore the mellow dyes of a spring evening when we returned to the gate. The air was scented with violets, jonquils and hyacinths opening wide their cups for draughts of the warm, sweet breeze. Just over the lovers' heads as they paused at the other extremity of the flower-skirted walk before turning to rejoin us, the crescent moon fainted in the pale yellow sky. Harry raised her hand to point it out to her companion. Both stood looking at it for a minute, their figures drawn darkly, yet in soft, uncertain lines above the hilly horizon.

"She saw it over her right shoulder!" escaped me in my exultation. "That is a *splendid* sign!"

"I cannot have you grow up superstitious, Judith," said my mentor, with perceptible emphasis on the second personal pronoun. "Do you suppose that our Heavenly Father would let your future happiness depend on the chances of seeing the moon to the right or the left of you? That would make Him out to be weaker and sillier than the most foolish person you ever saw."

"But dreams—now!" ventured I, cowed by his unwonted asperity.

"Come, sometimes, from heavy suppers. Sometimes, I verily believe, from the devil!"

The others were too near for farther talk between us, but cold shivers of doubt crept around my heart. Had there been diabolical agency in the vision that predicted this girl's meeting with her lover, even to the utterance of the line of the song that locked the chain upon heart and fancy?

Major Dabney lent his carriage and horses to convey

us back to our country homes. Apphia, saucy and rosy, with many added touches of city fashion in her apparel, mounted to the high box by the admiring coachman when her mistress and I were bestowed within the roomy chariot. A box of plants occupied the front seat. My precious tea-rose I carried in my own hands. The topmost bud tickled my nose, and I had to clutch it tightly to save it from breakage and bruise in the vicissitudes of the roads, which were at their spring worst. Sidney and Uncle Archie were outriders.

"On my way to jail, with a constable on each side!" Miss Harry put out her head to say to her friend who waited on the sidewalk to see us off.

The latter was very pretty that morning, her fluffy hair blowing over her forehead, her bloom deepening in the damp air. There were tears in her eyes, but she smiled them back, shook her head in arch reproof.

"No! to Paradise, attended by two Greathearts!" she retorted. "I wish I were going with you. Pity us poor creatures left in the City of Destruction!"

She could no more help speaking kindly than some people can help being blunt. This may have been only one of the tactful, gracious sayings with which she habitually covered the lapses and blunders of others. But I was grateful for it when I saw the brightness in Uncle Archie's face. The opportunities of confidential talk with the daughter of the house had been scant at his former visit. The present was absolutely barren of such advantages. Poor Harry's escapade had disturbed and occupied the thoughts of all. An imprudent lover might have hesitated to obtrude his suit in the circumstances. This one should have been used to putting by his own hopes and joys that the less important affairs of others might receive due attention.

We passed from the muddy, unpaved quarter devoted to private residences into Main Street, rumbled and jolted over the badly-laid cobble-stones that made a bottom for that popular thoroughfare, past the Eagle Hotel and the stores where we had spent many forenoons shopping, not only for ourselves, but for half the countryside. At the corner, where we turned toward Mayo's Bridge, was an organ-grinder, surrounded by the inevitable troop of urchins. His monkey was sprawling on the front of the nearest store at the full length of his tether; the thin-faced wife, wrapped in a tattered red shawl, beat her tambourine while her master sang "Buy a broom." It was very early in the day. Reddish fogs drooped low on the Chesterfield hills beyond the river, gave a lurid cast to the light in which we saw idle clerks standing in store-doors, colored porters arresting the business of sweeping the sidewalks to lean on their clumsy splint brooms and grin at the monkey's antics, the hollow cheeks and heavy eyes of the tambourine woman, and the stolid visage of her companion.

Miss Harry smiled languidly in response to my excited look, leaned forward and threw a coin to the musicians. I saw Sidney's contemptuous shrug and Uncle Archie's expression of amused surprise as the bright silver dollar struck and rolled on the stones under the woman's feet.

"If we had not stopped to look at them that day—" began Miss Harry. "But no! we could not have missed him, you know! It was foreordained!"

We did not miss him to-day. He stood at the Richmond end of the bridge, so near to the wheel-track as to be able to lay a bunch of violets on Miss Harry's knee. It was done in one swift, dexterous gesture, then he stood back with lifted hat, his passionate regards

burning on her face while the carriage rolled very slowly by.

"I 'd 'a' made that thick-headed 'Manuel stop clean, smack, dead still!" Apphia told me afterward; "but he was 'fraid o' his life o' Mars' Sidney. I ain't, you better b'lieve! He dar'sn't lay finger on me, an' cussin' don't break bones. I ain't been had no use for that possum-faced 'Manuel from that minnit. I tell him he ain't got the sperrit of a' old har'!"

Sidney had spurred on in advance to pay the toll, and not observed, while making change for the gate-keeper, the figure on the hither side of the toll-house until the violets had been given and the donor moved away from the wheels. I feared for an instant that the brother would have ridden him down, so fierce was the pull on the rein that drew the blooded horse back on his haunches, so menacing the brandish and snap of the whip in his other hand. Miss Harry did not see this by-play, or aught else besides the one face she might never behold again if Sidney were to give tone to family opinion. The apparition was a surprise as complete to her as to the others, and moved her as their formal parting in the garden had not. Heedless of observation and comment, she arose to kneel on the seat and get a last, long look out of the small, round window in the back curtain, then sank down in her corner and drew a thick veil over her face, weeping convulsively. I could not see for blinding tears, but I felt that one of the horsemen approached her window as if to speak, then checked himself, struck his horse smartly and dashed ahead. Not a sentence was uttered except in guarded sub-tones by the servants on the box, for several miles.

It was a tedious, drearisome journey. The red mud was up to the axles in the bottoms, and we would have sunk yet lower but for the "corduroy" underpinning of

logs in the worst morasses. Over this, progress was a cruel series of bumps, jolts and rockings that taxed human frames and carriage-springs to the utmost extent of endurableness. The horses drew their legs out of the viscid clay with a curious sucking noise as if malicious underground gnomes were smacking their lips in glee at our evil case. We stopped but half an hour at the House of Entertainment where we had dined so gayly six weeks before. The horses were rubbed down, a pail of corn meal and water administered to each, and we pushed on. Had our escorts been in tune for conversation, they could not have kept near enough to us for indulgence in the desire. The corduroy—otherwise the "gridiron" causeway—was a single track constructed in the middle of the broad public road. On each side of this were red deeps and danger, and almost as much might be said of the quaggy wastes outlying the double row of worn ruts zigzagging from one firm spot to another. By four o'clock the easily-returning clouds of spring-tide gathered portentously above us. By six, a fine chilly drizzle set in, and in another hour increased to a steady rainfall.

Still there was no talk of not reaching the home of one or the other section of the little party. The carriage-lamps were kindled at a wayside smithy, harness and horses inspected in the light of the forge-fire, and more meal and water administered. The gentlemen alighted, stamped hard and shook themselves before the blaze, to get rid of some of their encrustment of mud. Their shadows, grotesque and monstrous, filled the cabin, stretched away into the road and broke upon our wheels. Uncle Archie drew out a pocket-flask and cup, poured out something and brought it to Miss Harry.

"A little wine will do you good!" he said, without preamble, but in his usual tone.

If he had pitied her she probably would have refused it. As it was, she took the cup with a low "Thank you!" drank a part of the contents and pressed the rest on me.

"Are you very tired, Judith?" asked my uncle.

"A little, sir!"

"She is very good!" appended Miss Harry. "Very brave and patient!"

"That is well! She will sleep soundly to-night."

He shut the door. Emmanuel climbed to the box. The harness creaked and the carriage groaned as the horses dragged it out of the mud in which it had settled deeply during the halt. The light of the burning coal, the smell of which had brought Richmond and our departed holiday keenly back to me, faded in the rainy darkness. The miles grew longer and longer. I was fatigued beyond the power of complaint. In the darkness silent tears rained over the hands, numbed and sore with holding on to the tea-rose pot. Miss Harry was very kind, but she showed her compassionate interest by an occasional inquiry as to my welfare and such slight offices as lay in her power to offer toward mitigation of my evident discomfort. I understood, even then, that to attempt a show of cheerfulness was an impossibility with her. With the last glimpse of her lover, the excitement that had sustained her for three days utterly deserted her. The long, depressing day must have seemed full of sad presages. Her spirit could not but shrink in view of the battles to be fought with her nearest of kin, especially at the prospective struggle with the father who, idolizing her, would be, on that account, the more tenacious of the traditions of his tribe and order. She must also have dreaded, with different and haughtier feelings, county gossip, charged with her name; the varied phases of indignation,

grieved surprise and mean exultation the wagging tongues would express.

We had made room for Apphia inside of the carriage when the rain set in. She was asleep, wedged between the box of plants and the stuffed side of the vehicle, I well-nigh dead with drowsiness I dared not indulge, when Sidney called to the driver to stop, and, riding up alongside, addressed his sister for the first time since we left Major Dabney's door.

"Harry! it would not be safe to attempt the creek to-night. We think it better for you to drive on to Summerfield and stay there until morning. We are at the Cross-Roads now, three miles nearer Summerfield than Hunter's Rest."

"What does Mr. Read say?"

Her voice was hard as well as tired. She would accept nothing upon her brother's word. Uncle Archie was close at hand. His reply sounded in my very ear. I could imagine just how he leaned over in the saddle to lay his hand on the window-frame—the old, familiar attitude associated in my mind with fine-weather drives through forest roads and between plantation fences. With gay cortéges of fair girls and bevies of beaux reining in their curveting horses to exchange merry repartee and pay graceful compliment. With the days—how long past they were to me to-night!—when I had thought it a glorious thing to be a "turned-out" young lady with scores of admirers, and Miss Harry Macon the most enviable of created beings. We had stopped on the very spot where her father had stood, his gray head bared, holding the carriage door open for her on Christmas day, and half a dozen cavaliers had sprung from their saddles to attend her.

The rain plashed straight and sullenly into the pools, deadening the chafing of the boughs against one an-

other and the ceaseless sigh of the dripping pines. All this I thought and felt and heard, while Uncle Archie's voice gave me the impression of one thing strong and true amid gloom and dissolution:

"I hope you will not think of driving through the ford at this time of night. The water must be high, and your driver is not familiar with the road. In less than an hour we can be safely housed at Summerfield. You know how welcome you will be there."

"Thank you! Let it be as you wish! It is only waiting a little longer," she subjoined in an undertone, sinking back in her seat as we moved on. And yet lower, as if to herself—"But I wish it were over! How I wish it were over!"

"Miss Harry, honey! I wouldn't fret if I was you!" said Apphia, tenderly. "You allers could twis' Marster 'roun' your finger. Jes' you keep up a brave heart an' speak real peart to him, an' he 'll give you your own way same like he 's been doin' ever sence you was born. You 're Macon all over, an' thar never was one of 'em that would give up not ef they was cut to pieces, bit by bit. Ole Uncle Cæsar, he use' to say as how a snappin'-turkle 'ud never let go his bite 'thout it thundered, but that the thunders o' Mount Siny and the Jedgement day put together wouldn't shake off a Macon onct he 'd took holt."

She gave the sweet, shrill laugh of the mulatto at the, to me, unpleasing conceit. Her mistress did not reply. Perhaps she recollected that her father too was a full-blooded Macon.

The lighted windows of Summerfield shone dimly through the mists as we drew up at the gate. At Uncle Archie's shout, the house-dogs bounded across the yard, barking a vociferous welcome; dusky forms, bearing blazing lightwood knots, issued from the kitchen;

the door of the house was flung wide, and a flood of lamplight flickered on the drenched floor of the porch. When, wet, chilled and stiffened, we dragged our tired bodies up the steps, we found ourselves literally in the arms of the Blessed Three who had come forth to receive us.

"This is none other than the gate of heaven!" said Miss Harry, 'twixt laughing and crying, dropping her head on Grandma's shoulder. "Virginia called it Paradise, and she was right!"

It was ten o'clock when, dry, warm and cheery, we assembled about a smoking-hot supper, served on a round table before the fire in "the chamber"—Grandma's own room. There were four places, and Aunt Maria sat down to pour out coffee.

"Where is Sidney?" asked his sister, abruptly.

"He left us at the Cross-Roads. Didn't you know it?" returned Uncle Archie. "Having written to your father to expect you to-night, he was afraid he might be uneasy if he heard nothing of you—"

"Harry, dear!" cried Aunt Maria, starting up in real terror.

Harry had arisen to her full height; her face was fearful to behold with sneer and scowl.

"I comprehend!" she articulated, as if each slow syllable cost a separate action of lungs and throat. "If I had known it in time I would have followed him on foot. The risk of drowning would have been nothing to me compared with that of letting that traitor get to my father's ear before me. It was a clever trick! an honorable, manly subterfuge, worthy of him who contrived and carried it out! Living and dying, I will never forgive him!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Trouchin, in 1780, took stays, stocks and books from Neckar's precocious daughter, and turned her loose in the fields to run with the colts and calves, he was so far in advance of the sentiment of the day with regard to the training of girls that we do not wonder at the resentment of the mother, the *ci-devant* governess.

"She is nothing to what I would have made her!" Madam Neckar would say slightingly, when congratulated upon the brilliant social and literary successes of the De Stäel.

Popular prejudice had yielded so slowly to common sense and the teachings of experience, that in 1832 stated exercise in the open air, as a Christian duty of women and girls, was as little thought of as the magnetic telegraph. Men lived much out of doors, spending whole days in the saddle, and tramping for long hours over their plantations, and, gun on shoulder, through the woods in pursuit of abundant game. Every woman could ride on horseback for the sake of convenience, carriages being comparatively few in some neighborhoods, and the roads in winter and spring almost impassable to lighter vehicles than four-horse wagons. The conventional gentlewoman of that generation "sat on a cushion" in-doors or on the roofed porch, and "sewed up a seam," summer, winter, spring and autumn. She was inducted into the mysteries of the daintier arts of housewifery—preserving, pickling, jelly and cake-making; could wash her own laces, and clear-starch her own muslins, "give out" breakfast, dinner

and supper, and was proficient in fine and fancy needlework. Laid away among my precious things is an ancient counterpane, embroidered in thirteen different stitches, by my grandmother's shapely hands. The cotton of which it is made grew on her father's plantation; was woven into a fine twilled fabric in the loom-room; her three sisters each designed a corner pattern; her only brother, who was very much in love with the fair neighbor he afterward married, sketched an altar, upbearing a pair of apoplectic hearts spitted with an arrow and steaming with affection, for the fourth corner. On the centre piece, the owner, belle and betrothed, exercised her taste and skill. Within a lozenge, exactly in the middle of the counterpane, the bride of a week worked in stiff, lean letters, her new name,

"*Judith Read, 1790.*"

Aunt Maria wrought diligently three years on a duplicate of the treasured heirloom, the original descending to my mother as the eldest child who survived infancy.

My grandmother wore tight stays from the hour she arose from her feather bed in the morning until Mammy 'Ritta undid the stout laces for the night. Unless really ill she never lay down in the day-time, and when the weather was even slightly unpleasant, did not leave the house and porches for weeks together. Her skin was as fine-grained and smooth as ivory, and in late life as colorless; her limbs, feet and hands retained their delicacy of form to the last. My mother and Aunt Maria were less hale than she, and both died under sixty years of age. That I, the fragile offshoot of the ancient stock, was suffered to roam at will in meadow and woods until anxious heads were shaken over the probability that I would grow up a "tom-boy," was due to my Uncle Archie's influence with the feminine cabal. That I am

alive upon the earth this day and in fair health, I owe, under Heaven, to his wise indulgence of my love of rambles and farm sports. I rode behind him on a sheepskin pillion when he made his rounds of the plantation; trudged over frozen fields at his side to see the ice-cutting on the mill-pond. From him I gleaned the knowledge of forestry and timbering which makes my woodland strolls a never-failing source of enjoyment.

On a mid-April day, a fortnight or so after my return from town, he invited me to ride with him into the heart of the woods, where he was to inspect timber cut during the winter for new fences and barns. He set me down, at my request, at what I had named "my bower." About the trunk of a large maple tree a cluster of saplings had sprung up on all sides but one. In this opening the bulging roots heaved their knees into a mossy lap, sloping down to the edge of a rapid brook. Two years before Uncle Archie had assisted me to lash the supple young trees into a pent-house above the green velvet cushion. Last summer he had bound other wayward sprays down to their appointed places, until the fiercest sun could not penetrate the thatched arch, and we had once found beneath it a safe refuge from a summer shower. The branches were scantily decked to-day with tufts of downy, pinkish foliage; the ground was strewed with the dried flowers pushed off by the leaf-buds. I brushed them from the moss, hung my "snack"-basket on a broken branch, and assured Uncle Archie that I should have a grand holiday all by myself. He need not hurry back.

"I shall not be very far away," he said. "Only on the other side of the hill, where the men are loading the wagon. But I may be gone some time."

"Never mind! I brought my book"—producing "Moral Tales." "I have only read it twice."

"How many readings do you expect to give it?"

He stooped to pick it up; turned with affected carelessness to the fly-leaf, where Miss Virginia had written her name and mine.

"Oh, eight or nine, I suppose! I read 'Pilgrim's Progress' through three or four times a year. There are so few really interesting Sunday books beside that and Miss Hannah More's 'Tracts,' and the Bible, of course."

He pinched my cheek, repeating laughingly, "Of course!" put the book down tenderly on my lap, and mounted his horse.

"If you want me, you have only to call very loudly," was his parting admonition.

It was not likely that I should have occasion to summon him. The woods were safe, the day was perfect. I did not care to open my book at once. Resting against the brown-gray trunk, I bethought me that I had missed seeing the crimson tassels this season; pitied them for having burned out their brief life and fallen unheeded. I fancied how the ground had looked gorgeously carpeted with them; how they had whirled and danced on the brook, been heaped up in eddies and behind stones, and caught in the long grasses shimmering and swaying below the surface of the water that went swishing and gurgling down to the creek a mile below. Such a dear, wonderful little brook! twisting and glittering and darkling, but always happy and clean, for its course was over smooth pebbles and between banks bound into compactness by reticulated roots, and turfed and mossed to the brink. A companionable little brook, in which I had built grottoes, with colored stones for pixies, and over which leaned certain gnarled and hollow trees, wherein might dwell dryads and elves, although tenanted at present by gray squirrels, that

barked and scolded when I came too near to them in their romping races over dry leaves and brushwood. A very tempting brook to-day, being so full after the spring floods that the water was clear brown in the hollows, yet warm down to the bottom. I laid my book in a crotched branch, beyond the reach of scattering drops, pulled off my home-knit stockings and thick shoes, drew the skirt of my blue-spotted frock up to my knees and stepped into the delicious tide. I had done the same often enough to learn that better wading-grounds lay down the stream, and splashed gayly along, stopping now and then to revel in the ripple of the soft current over my "ankles, bare and brown," and to watch the minnows in the shallows. A school of these took flight at my approach, and darted away, throwing somersaults over the stones, and floating, sometimes head first, sometimes backward and upside-down in the rapids. I gave chase in sheer light-heartedness, holding my skirts well up and dashing the spray right and left until I was in water knee-deep.

Just where my brook spread out into a miniature lake, fringed by "branch-willows," ochreous and glossy to the tiniest tip, and studded with grayish leaves, I turned a sharp corner, and came full upon two people seated on a fallen trunk.

"Why, Sweetbrier!" cried Harry Macon, with an agitated laugh. "How you startled me! Did you drop from the clouds?" More nervously still: "Who is with you?"

Mr. Waring had arisen with her, and made me a profound bow.

"Good-day, fair Musidora!"

I had let fall my frock, and it clung and flapped soakingly against my naked legs. A hot red vapor seemed to envelop me like a veil of shame. The power of motion

with that of speech forsook me. I had a wild impulse to fall, face foremost, in the brook and drown myself out of present misery and a life that had grown suddenly dreadful. I heard Miss Harry say something hurried and inaudible, and the sound of retreating footsteps. When she spoke again she was alone and standing at the water's edge.

"Come to me, dear," she said, soothingly. "There is no harm done. Are you alone?"

"Yes, ma'am," faltered I. "Uncle Archie brought me, but he went away."

"I am glad he did!" She was wringing and shaking out the wet hem of my petticoats. "I don't want him or anybody else to know that I am here. I am not sorry to have a chance of a talk with you. Sit down by me, and put your feet on that mossy stone. They will soon dry in the sun. You must take a message to your uncle from me. But do not deliver it until you hear that I have gone away. Do you understand me, Judith?"

I nodded obediently, staring right at her, not yet collected enough to gather any other sense from the words than the ear caught mechanically. She was very pale, and spoke in a thin, unsteady voice, not at all like her own. While talking she tore off the tawny bark from the willow wands nearest her, divided the strips into threads, and tossed them into the water.

"Tell him not to blame me. That I am driven to it. That I receive neither justice nor mercy from my father and brothers. That when the information for which they have written to England comes—and it cannot get here under three months—they will be no better satisfied than they are now. They will pretend to believe the letters forgeries or falsehoods. They are determined not to be convinced. There is but one way to force the truth upon them. I must go myself to Fairwold Hall,

and write to them from there. Sidney objects to my talking to your uncle. He says, 'Archie is too easy with you. He encourages you to be headstrong.' But tell him to go to my father, when I have gone, and make him understand that he will not hear from me until I can date my letter from the house he tells me has no place on earth outside of my imagination. My father was never unkind to me before. I never had a harsh word from him. He would not kiss me when I went to bed last night, because I would not pledge my word to hold no communication with Mr. Waring until we should hear from England. Sidney and I do not speak to one another, and poor Di cries all the time. Even Rod, who used to take my part in all our disputes, writes from Philadelphia that he will never own me as a sister again if I do not give up what he calls "a disgraceful fancy." He says he has not been able to study or sleep since he first heard of it. They are killing me by fast inches! Look at my hands!"

She bared her wrists. The veins stood out high and blue, the muscles showed whitely.

"In three months I should not be worth any man's taking. They will have hounded me into my grave, or the mad-house. Sometimes I wonder if I *am* quite sane. I don't know myself as the Harry Macon who was so happy last Christmas."

She had rushed on in the review of her wrongs with the impetuosity of one who must have the relief of speech in a sympathizing ear. Now, she pulled herself up and tried to seem calm.

"You won't forget what I have told you, Judith?"

"It is a great deal to remember," uttered I, in my old-womanish way. "But I will try. It is dreadful that they treat you so unkindly—" winding my arms about her as if their weak strain could stay the breaking

heart. "Why don't you come to Summerfield to stay? Nobody is cruel to anybody there. And we are all devoted to you. Don't you think Uncle Archie could do something for you? He always does help 'most everybody."

"He can't help me, dear. If he could, he would. God bless him for the truest friend I ever had! Tell him that too, Judith! That if I were on my death-bed, I should still pray that God would bless him and give him the desire of his heart. Say that just as I do —'the desire of his heart and the light of his eyes,'— those dear, honest, tender eyes! He will know what I mean.

"Now I must go! Papa and Sidney are off at court to-day, or I should not have been able to leave the plantation without the escort of one of them. They dog me like my shadow. I may not see you in a long time again, Sweetbrier. But you are a darling, and a comfort, and my own friend wherever I may be. Some day I shall beg to have you for a whole year, all to myself, and come for you. Don't breathe a word of having met me until—you know when. Then, give my love to Grandma, Aunt Betsey and Maria, and ask them to think as well of me as they can. And don't let anybody teach *you* to hate me and call me ugly names. Good-by, darling!"

She clasped me closely to her breast, kissed me over and over. In the midst of my stupefaction, the thought crept into my mind that it was as the puny representative of all she was deserting—home-loves and friends and girlhood's affluence of gayety and triumph—that I received the grieffull passion of her caress. At last she let me go, and walked away very fast down a disused cart-road, now overgrown with coarse herbage. Almost at the end of the vista thus formed, I descried a woman

on horseback holding two horses beside her own, and knew her for Apphia by the gay turban and parti-colored dress. Mr. Waring joined Miss Harry before she had gone far. I watched them as they mounted and rode off, Miss Harry waving a handkerchief in farewell to the abject speck of humanity gazing at her from the bank of the stream.

Shaken, stunned and sick, I followed the brook back to my mossy seat, keeping ashore. I loathed the thought of wading as I would have shrunk from banjo-music at a funeral. Twice I stumbled over prostrate logs, my ankles and feet were torn by mats and ropes of trailing bamboo, or "cat-brier." I washed the bloody scratches in the warm water and drew on my stockings, sobbing bitterly all the while. The cup of childish woe had been dangerously full many times within this eventful year. It streamed over, now, in torrents. Miss Harry meant to run away to be married! I had heard of such flights over the Virginia border into North Carolina or Maryland. In our State the consent of parents or guardian was essential to the legality of a minor's marriage. Most fathers forgave offenses of this sort, and no obloquy was attached to the contracting parties. Still I wept out of the soreness of a new distrust. I had suddenly conceived a prejudice against Mr. Waring. I did not believe that the real Prince would have accosted me as "Musidora." He may not have suspected that I had read "Thomson's Seasons," but he might have taken it for granted that Miss Harry had. Musidora was, in my opinion, a very careless, if not an improper young woman, her Damon an impudent spy, and the story anything but a nice one. Uncle Archie would not have alluded to it in the presence of ladies, nor would Captain Macon or his sons. What if they were nearer right, after all, in their views of her love-affair

than was she who sacrificed everything to follow this man's fortunes?

My eyes were red, my cheeks blotched by tears when my protector returned and proposed to share my lunch of ginger-cakes and apples.

"What is the matter?" he broke off the sentence to inquire, catching a glimpse of my averted face.

I shook my head, my feelings knotting up hard in my throat, my lids again drenched.

His eyes fell on my damp garments, and twinkled in spite of his kind heart.

"Ah! I see! Never mind, little woman! I should enjoy a wade myself this morning. The water is just right. I'll speak to Aunt Maria about the wet frock!"

I overheard him, in my flight up to my room on reaching home, explain to his sister that "the poor child was almost heart-broken because she had got her frock in the water while wading," and I fairly hated my deceitful, ungrateful self. But had I not been charged to keep silence as to the occurrences of the forenoon?

"The Reads never break faith! The Truehearts do not betray trust!" gulped I magniloquently, twisting my short arms over my shoulders to button up the dry gown behind.

The aptness of the phraseology surprised myself. I had not read "Moral Tales" twice in vain. The declaration sounded as well as many passages of "Rob Roy," which Uncle Archie was reading aloud on evenings and rainy days.

In my ignorance of ways, means and the conventionalities of elopements, I believed that I had witnessed the first stage of the fugitives' journey. The third day after the scene at the creek was Sunday, and I was astounded by the apparition of the bride-expectant at Old Singinsville, pale and graver-eyed than usual, but evi-

dently still Harry Macon, and under the protection of father and brother.

Grandma beckoned Captain Macon to our carriage when his two daughters were shut up in theirs.

"Come over and see us soon!" she half whispered, leaning out of the window. "I have a little friendly scolding in store for you. You must not take it amiss. I am afraid you are handling a delicate machine a *little* roughly. It is too valuable to be trifled with."

The grand old gray head sank dejectedly.

"I will not affect to misunderstand you, madam. Heaven is my witness how thankfully I shall listen to counsel, suggestion or rebuke from a friend so judicious, a woman so true-hearted as yourself. I confess myself to be baffled and discouraged. I apprehend that we shall agree as to the main issue involved?" with a keen interrogatory look.

"There can be little difference of opinion on that head between sensible people. But the parting with the right eye or hand must always seem cruel to the young. It behooves us in our age and experience to be merciful and tender. I will not detain you. Maria will drive over to-morrow to beg a week's visit from Harry. You will trust her with us?"

"Gratefully, madam! I could ask no wiser mentors, no gentler physicians to a mind diseased. I will not mention the projected visit to poor Harriet. She views with a jaundiced eye every subject broached by me. May He who knows men's hearts and sees the bitterness of mine, in His own good time unseal her eyes!"

"Amen!" responded the venerable sisters, as he retreated with one of his incomparable reverences.

Miss Harry's coming was discussed at our supper-table that evening. There should be a "dining-day" on Tuesday at Summerfield of the young people she

liked best. A fishing-party on Read's mill-pond was planned for Wednesday, a horseback excursion and dinner in Burwell's woods, fifteen miles away, for Thursday; Aunt Maria proposed to take her guest on Friday to Bellair to visit my mother, the early friend and ally of the refractory beauty, and remain there over the Sabbath.

"I don't know whether this junketing talk is quite the thing for Sunday," demurred Aunt Betsey in the course of the consultation.

"'The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days, and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship,'" quoted Grandma from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and, with judicial impressiveness, "'*except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy!*' The Master would say, I think, that it is lawful to save life, and what is better than life —happiness—on His holy day."

Aunt Maria's colored class met to be catechised on Sunday nights in the dining-room. I sat by Mammy, and answered in my turn. I remember distinctly one question that fell to her on this particular evening. In her Sabbath-day garb of black bombazine, a snowy turban bound about her head, and as white a 'kerchief crossed on her bosom, she sat, as dignified and upright as her mistress would have done, at the top of the room, on the alert to quell the restlessness or antics of the juniors by a glance, yet devoutly attentive to the lesson.

"'What are the benefits which, in this life, do accompany or flow from Justification, Adoption and Sanctification?'" asked Aunt Maria's silvery voice.

There was a soundless flutter of exultation among

such idle younglings as Gabriel and Michael when what they denominated "one o' them long fellows" was drawn by Mammy. It struck off one from their list of probable discomfitures, and there was sublimity in her acceptance of her fate, music in her sonorous enunciation of the pregnant sentences. Her black eyes sought a fixed spot pretty high up on the opposite wall. Her folded hands were motionless while she replied slowly and reverently, pausing to mark each division of topics, and rising in a noble crescendo to the emphatic finale:

"'The benefits which, in this life, do accompany or flow from Justification, Adoption and Sanctification are: Assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, *increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the End!*'"

It helped one to comprehend what the End would be to such sincere and steadfast souls as hers to hear the unction with which Mammy brought out those last words.

The drill was highly satisfactory that evening. Those who generally fell halt or lame by the way had extraordinary liberty of speech, and the proficient were glib beyond precedent. All united in the last hymn with stout lungs and approving consciences. The words were such as especially delectate the negro imagination:

> "Lo! on a narrow neck of land,
> 'Twixt two unbounded seas I stand,
> Yet how insensible!
> A point of time, a moment's space
> Removes me to yon heavenly place,
> Or—shuts me up in hell!"

The devout hymnist of the time saw no incongruity in singing what he believed and held for certain. I could close my eyes as they rolled out the dolorous canticle, and picture it all to myself. The neck of land was the Isthmus of Darien; the vexed Atlantic was this

life; the sunny hazes of the Pacific took shape into gleaming columns and airy domes, and walls of jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardins, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprasus, jacinth and amethyst. Hell moved beneath me, even while my eyes dwelt upon the celestial battlements, and so near that I could hear the bellowings of the volcanic fires.

Aunt Maria's taste was for gentler themes. The curdling of blood, the shiver of spirit and flesh attendant upon the contemplation of the abodes of the finally impenitent were distress and personal pain to her. She let her sable disciples sing the hymns selected by themselves, then lifted her pale, pure face from the hand that had supported and shaded it.

"Let us pray!"

We all knelt and repeated with her as one voice, "Our Father who art in Heaven!"

She sent them away with the "Glory forever and ever!" in ear and heart.

Mine was the additional treat of having her sit beside me and talk of Bible stories and Christian's arrival at the Celestial City, and most in detail of what I had been reading that day as the portion of the Scripture lesson in course—the history of Jezebel's crimes and fate. I recollect asking her what was the meaning of "tired her head and looked out at a window."

"Oh!" said I, disappointed on learning that the royal murderess had assumed her most becoming head-dress. "I thought she leaned against the window as you do sometimes when you are tired. I saw you sitting so at the school-room window to-day while I was reading that very verse. I should think you would be lonely in there, Aunt Maria! I can't bear the place. The desks and benches, and especially Mr. Bradley's chair, make it all seem so desolate."

"It is a quiet place, dear, and one likes to be alone and still when she is reading or thinking. But it is time you were asleep. I will put out the light and stay with you awhile."

The graceful outline of her head and neck against the moonlit window faded into and mingled with dreams in which Mr. Bradley and Jehu were oddly associated and Jezebel toppled over on the uncomfortable side of the "neck of land." A soothing blank, fraught with refreshment, followed, and I unclosed my young eyes upon a bright, fragrant morning.

Aunt Maria, in her white night-dress, her hair loosened on her shoulders as she had shaken it down for combing, stood motionless and pallid in the sunlight, transfixed by the tale Mammy was narrating.

"It is too true, honey! Mars' Sidney was here by sunrise to see Mars' Archie 'bout it, pretty nigh crazy, too—pore young gentleman! Heby—Miss Diana's maid—she 'twas foun' it out, when thar was no signs o' Apphia comin' down sta'rs to fotch up water for Miss Harry's room. So she went up to see what was the matter, an' lo, an' behole! Miss Harry's bed hadn't been slep' in all night, an' Apphia, she was gone too. They mus' 'a' stole off 'bout ten o'clock, for Cap'n Macon's Rube, he was goin' home from seein' his sweetheart, one of Mr. James Carrington's house-servants, an' met a strange carriage in the road, near 'leven. Mars' Archie had his horse saddled right off and rode back with him to Hunter's Res'. I heerd Mars' Sidney say that his father was threatened with somethin' like a fit, an' pore Miss Diana was goin' from one faint to another. Miss Harry may have had a good deal to b'ar, but she 'd never 'a' gone off with the bes' man livin' ef she could 'a' foreseen the misery she 'd leave behin' her. The Lord be more merciful to the pore dear lamb than she 's been to them that 's nearest o' kin to her!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE drouth that visited certain counties in Central and Southern Virginia in August and September of 1832 may not have been exceptionally severe, but the accessories and incidents of the calamity stand out with lurid distinctness in my memory. For fifty-seven days not a drop of rain fell on the Summerfield plantation. The sun was a copper ball; the moon wan and sickly. The dust of the public roads was half a foot deep, and floated, a reddish powder, in the atmosphere. The long leaves of the maize twisted more and more tightly, hung wilted and prone against the stems, until the unripe ears perished in the dried "shucks," and stalks and leaves were cut for foddering the cattle. Pasture-fields were sere and blackened as by fire. The lean kine tore up grass roots and chewed them to extract what succulence the baked earth had left in the fibrous threads. Small streams disappeared entirely, and many large ones were but a succession of shrinking pools connected by ooze creeping sluggishly among the hot stones. Almost every mill in the district hung upon the outer wall a useless wheel with blistered rim and warping flanges.

By the middle of September the forests of deciduous trees were of a dull brown, and the blackish verdure of the pines opposed a funereal contrast. Petitions were offered in all the churches for rain. Mr. Watt and Mr. Burgess cried out to the Lord in the great congregation that "the heavens over our head were as brass, and the earth that was under us was as iron; that the rain of our land was as powder and dust." With all the

energy of men whose own farms eked out salaries which were inadequate to the support of large and growing families, they besought mercy upon a people chastised for their sins and rewarded according to their iniquities. The periodical August "protracted meeting" at Old Singinsville was a season of fasting, humiliation and prayer, participated in by multitudes who plowed and waded through the choking dust of the highways to unite the weight of their lamentations and supplications.

Dearth and drouth were at their worst when there was brought one evening from the post-office to Uncle Archie, a thick packet directed in Mr. Bradley's hand, and post-marked "New York." It was opened while we were at supper, and proved to contain, besides a letter, a mammoth poster, setting forth the unparalleled attractions of a circus troupe performing nightly in Montreal. Among the "stars" was included "MR. FREDERICK TREVELYAN, late of Van Amburg's Celebrated Company, the World-Renowned Acrobat and Rider, best known in Europe and America as the 'Modern Phœbus.'"

Had the gorgeous apparition in white and silver that carried the Richmond spectators by storm alighted among the china and silver of our country tea-table, the sensation would hardly have been more pronounced than that produced by the glaring advertisement of his return to his former profession. Up to that moment there had smouldered in the breasts of us all some belief in the truth of his pretensions to gentlemanhood.

In the farewell note to her sister found in Harry's room, she had stated that they were on the eve of departure for England, their passage being already taken in the packet which would sail the next week; also, that she would not write again until she could date her

letter from Fairwold Hall. Mr. Waring had inclosed the certificate of the marriage (performed at Washington) in a dignified dispatch to Captain Macon, saying that, should he desire to communicate with his daughter, or to send any articles belonging to her, Mr. Waring's agent in Baltimore, whose address was given, would take charge of letter or parcel. Within a day after the receipt of this epistle everything the misguided girl had called her own in her father's house, even to her half-worn shoes, was packed under Captain Macon's eye and dispatched as directed. Upon a sheet of paper laid within the great case, the Captain wrote, steadying the hand that had been tremulous since the hour in which he discovered his child's flight:

"*When Harriet writes to me I shall answer her letter. Communications on her behalf penned by another will receive no notice.*"

This circus bill, "stripped from a street wall in Montreal," wrote Mr. Bradley, "was ten days old when I tore it off."

It was the only hint Harry's friends had had of the whereabouts of the pair since the receipt of the certificate.

Uncle Archie sent Jerry, the butler, from the room and read the New York letter aloud. Mr. Bradley had entered a law office in Philadelphia at the close of his school term in July. Aunt Betsey had heard from him twice; he had sent a paper to Aunt Maria, marking several articles to attract her eye, and written once before to Uncle Archie since leaving Richmond. He was a good friend and correspondent of the family of which he had once formed a part. He stated now that he had spared no pains to collect information respecting the movements of the company, which had left Montreal before his arrival in that city, but his efforts had been

indifferently successful. That "Frederick Trevelyan" was John Waring, and not a transferred title to another member of Van Amburg's troupe, was made altogether certain by the descriptions he received of his person and performances. If he had a wife the fact was not known to his public. Nor could Mr. Bradley obtain definite intelligence as to the route taken by the circus when the Montreal engagement was concluded.

"I must take this over to Hunter's Rest to-morrow," sighed Uncle Archie, folding up poster and letter.

A troubled silence ensued. The pale anxiety in the brother's face had a reflection in that of the sister, bowed mournfully over the slender finger that followed the pattern of the damask table-cloth. Neither was looking well this summer. The harassing cares and anxieties incident to the drouth explained this, in part, but to my senses, preternaturally quickened by the events of the early spring, there was something beneath and back of the grave quiet that had become habitual to them.

In the long, serious talk Uncle Archie held with me when I delivered the message left for him by Miss Harry, he had exculpated me from conscious error in concealing my knowledge of the projected elopement. He was not one to reason out of a straight line; had little knowledge of and no patience with the shool of ethics that blends motives and tones down principles.

"We have trained the child to mind her own business and to speak the truth," he said when Aunt Betsey "wished that the plot had been revealed in time to hinder the dear, infatuated girl from sealing her destruction." "She was told to hold her tongue, and she held it. She must not be blamed."

Nevertheless, I stole after him as he left the table

and went out upon the back porch—slipped my fingers timidly into his.

"Are you displeased with me, Uncle Archie?"

He passed his hand over my hair, but his speech was brief.

"No, child! I am thinking. Run away now!"

I withdrew to the end of the piazza, and, drawing myself up against the wall to be out of his beat as he walked, lay down at full length on the cool, oaken floor. I was never robust, and the dry, unvarying heat of the weather weakened me more than my elders suspected. Silent tears wetted the boards under my cheek. The world was getting to be a dreary home. An unlovely one, as I saw it to-night, the withered vines drooping in the stirless air, the faint moon wistfully surveying blighted fields from which no harvest-songs would arise this year. I could scarcely draw breath in the radiated heat thrown off by the earth after the torrid day.

Presently a slim white figure joined the solitary promenader, leaned on his offered arm as if the support were needed.

"*My* letter was from Richmond," I heard her say, and, for several turns, nothing more.

"Well!" from Uncle Archie, at last—calm, and not inquisitive.

"It is not a long letter, and, like her last, somewhat dispirited. Something weighs on her heart, although she does not say so. She writes of commonplace affairs; is sorry the drouth is so much worse here than in Richmond; hopes it will not entirely destroy the tobacco and corn crops; asks if Diana Macon has gone to the White Sulphur Springs yet; if Roderick is taking a summer course in Philadelphia; if we ever hear from Mr. Bradley and how he is getting on, and half a dozen other questions as fast as she can run them off. I could

imagine that she did it to make sure that my answer should not deal with personal and confidential matters. I don't understand her at all; unless—she regrets the answer sent to your letter!"

"Nothing is less probable!" quickly and positively. "It is more likely that she fears lest your feelings may be changed in consequence of her correspondence with me."

"I reassured her on that point weeks ago. The change I speak of has come on lately. It is never easy to get at her hidden hurt, when she has one. She is unselfish even in this. For instance, she has never intimated to me that her home is not altogether pleasant. Yet Mrs. Dabney's peculiarities must be a severe trial."

"She dreads to inflict pain. *I* ought to know that!"

Aunt Betsey's appearance in the doorway with the original observation that the weather was "really alarmingly dry," checked farther confidences. The dear woman walked to the edge of the porch-floor, pulled a bit of the dying vine from the trellis and sighed audibly.

"'The wicked walk on every side, and the vilest men are exalted!' What with the chances of Jackson's re-election and the almost certainty of civil war should that come to pass (for South Carolina could *not* be pacified), and the drouth and sorrow and disgrace in so many homes—I am continually reminded of that passage in Habakkuk, 'Thou didst march through the land in indignation. Thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.'"

"Ah! but you forget the ending of the same chapter."

Aunt Maria had left her brother's arm and leaned on the porch-railing, her colorless face lifted to the moon, the very picture of purity and peacefulness. She so rarely gave utterance to the strong feelings that upbore and made stable her lovely equanimity of temper and

demeanor, that Aunt Betsey turned toward her in surprise when she began to speak.

"'Although the fig tree shall not blossom,'" she recited slowly and softly, "'neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!'"

She passed down the steps in her rustleless white gown, like a ray of moonlight, and across the yard to Mammy's cottage, aunt and brother watching her in silence.

"She lives very near!" uttered Aunt Betsey at length, shaking her head. "Very close to her Master. And the refining has gone on rapidly of late. He must see the reflection of His face with hardly a blur."

"You have observed it, too, have you? I thought it might be a notion of mine—some peculiarity in my own mood, that made her seem dearer and sweeter than ever."

"Ah, the dear child has enough to grieve her, with her sympathetic, loving nature!" answered Aunt Betsey. "She takes her friends' troubles sadly to heart—weeps with those that weep as if the affliction were her own."

Uncle Archie resumed his walk, head bent and hands crossed behind him. Was he remorseful that he had shared his sorrow with this tender spirit?

Presently he stopped abruptly, and picked me up bodily.

"We must contrive some means to make this birdling eat more, Aunt Betsey! She doesn't come up to 'hag's weight!'"

"What is that?" asked I, half fearfully, yet diverted.

"Eighty pounds. If you go on in this way I shall be able soon to carry you on my little finger as I would a feather. It is your bedtime now. I am going over to Hunter's Rest very early in the morning. Don't you want a ride? You needn't speak! I can see your eyes in the moonlight. Tell Mammy to call you in time, and to have a bowl of bread and milk for you before we set off."

His cheery tone and thoughtfulness of my health and pleasure were not like the morbose abstraction of a disappointed lover.

Nor was his morning mood. He had set aside a steady pony for my use early in the year, and himself acted as my riding-master. My habit was a nankeen skirt that fell a few inches below the hem of my gown, and buttoned all the way down. Before I alighted from my horse after a ride my escort unfastened this to the last button, and when I was lifted out of it, threw it upon the saddle. My dress was in all other respects unchanged from my usual attire. The close cloth jacket and flowing skirt, the man's collar and hat were not adopted, even by fashionable equestrians of my sex, until a decade later.

Uncle Archie examined my stirrup, saddle-girth and bridle, and settled me in the side-saddle which had been used by two generations before it fell to me. It had but one pommel and a small black horn; the seat was of smooth, hard leather, and the stirrup open. Over my shoulders was pinned a nankeen cape, feather-stitched with scarlet crewel; on my arms were long home-made gloves, or "mitts," of the same material, similarly embroidered, that left my fingers bare from the second knuckle; a white cape-bonnet covered my head. My pony was an easy pacer. Ladies never rode trotters, nor did men from choice. The best saddle-horses were

unbroken to harness, and trained only to the pace, canter, gallop and run.

The morning was already sultry, but Uncle Archie raised his head and drew in a long breath as one of his hounds would have snuffed the wind.

"'All signs fail in dry weather,' or I should say that I smell rain, and not far off!"

"Would it save the tobacco?"

We were jogging along between the melancholy brown fields.

"No."

"Nor the corn?"

"It is too late to help either."

"What will you do if *all* the crops fail, Uncle Archie?"

He smiled down at me, his face as tranquil as the dawn against which the distant hills stood up like purple mounts of sacrifice, the sacred fires kindling on their altars.

"You heard what Aunt Maria said last night? There is but one trust and one joy that never fail us, Judith!"

They styled such talk in that generation, "Conversation on the Subject of Religion," and young, unregenerate people held themselves aloof from the holy ground. Traditions of the approach, with unsandaled foot, of the mystic preparation of the soul, typified by purification with oil of myrrh and sweet odors, warned off the uninitiated. "The awful circle of the church" was no strained metaphor in this connection. Those who loved the Lord and had confessed Him before men, spake often one to another when age and sanctified experience of life and vital godliness had opened hearts and lips, but even they were not wont to address the language of the Kingdom to the unconverted except in entreaty and warning. Within two years I had been adjudged to be

indubitably "of an accountable age"—date of dread to my apprehension. The prayers of a godly ancestry could not save my shivering soul, nor the sweet saintliness of my living kindred reflect one ray of hope upon the dark curtain of the hereafter I could not escape. I was like a baby torn from her mother's bosom and flung upon a weltering deep to swim or drown for myself. I was a "responsible human being," and as such, had already been labored with at a protracted meeting by Mr. Burgess (whom I could never bear afterward), and a Methodist sister, who put a fat arm about me on a hot day, as she adjured me to flee from the wrath to come, and when I sobbed piteously with nameless terror and excitement, promised to remember me in her prayers. I felt that the Wesleyan sister had taken a liberty, being our overseer's wife, and uneducated, whereas we were Presbyterian gentlefolk; but she was less objectionable than Mr. Burgess. Hers was kindly officiousness, since she could derive no benefit personally from my conversion. I could not have framed into words my idea that Mr. Burgess' strivings with my soul were perfunctory, and that his salary meant so much per head for every "addition to the church." In portentous gutturals he held forth to me upon my carnal mind and reprobate will, and bound on my raw, quivering conscience the load of my "awful obligation as a child of the covenant," to make my calling and election sure. After that I never truthfully returned thanks that "I was not born a heathen child."

Sweet moisture filled my eyes as Uncle Archie spoke. It was not a bit like preaching, but no sermon ever fastened on my soul such conviction that he who delivered it believed thoroughly in the truth he taught. He said "us," too, as if including me! I felt the pressure of a mighty, invisible Arm about my weak, ignorant self;

the stirring of a new hope in my soul. Uncle Archie's religion would be a comfortable thing to have. Up to that hour I had anticipated the throes of conviction, the birth of conversion, as eminently advisable. In plain terms, they were the essential process by which to avoid the eternal agonies of the "shut-up hell" of which we sang. But in this life—short and uncertain as it was—how *good* to know that faith and joy would never fail us!

We rode on the margin of the road-bed, trampling pennyroyal and wooly-leaved sheepmint into perfume, and chatting cheerfully until the sight of Hunter's Rest brought up strongly the thought of our errand with the master of the domain.

It was a dark-red brick house, with one wooden wing. A railing ran along the outer edge of the square roof of the main building, a wide piazza across the lower frontage. The walks of a spacious yard were edged with box, the aromatic pungency of which is ever associated in my mind with the venerable homestead. The sun was beginning to draw it out into the air when we dismounted at the yard-gate. The premises were strangely still. Miss Diana and Sidney were at the Springs. Roderick was walking a Philadelphia hospital. The windows of the first floor were wide open, but not a face appeared at any one of them. Two ancient watch-dogs lay on the gravel-walk, and looked up to wag their tails as Uncle Archie stepped out on the turf to avoid treading on them. In nearing the house we heard the measured voice of one reading. Uncle Archie signed to me to walk lightly in ascending the steps. From the porch-floor we had a view of the interior of the large parlor.

Captain Macon sat in lonely state at the top of the room in the arm-chair he had occupied at family wor-

ship for a quarter of a century when his growing family gathered about him. I should have looked twice before recognizing him had I seen him anywhere else. Instead of his scarlet coat, he wore a complete suit of white flannel, and there was not much more color in the long hair brushed back from his face. The greatest change in his appearance was *there.* The florid complexion had faded into the dead hue of parchment; the forehead was crossed by tightly-pressed plaits; the skin hung loose from the square chin. His dress was arranged with his usual military precision, even to the crimpled frills of his shirt-bosom. He sat as erect as a ramrod, except for the head bowed toward the big Bible on the stand before him. One arm—the right—lay straight out from the elbow along the chair-arm, which was also a desk, and I noticed that he turned the leaves of the book with the left hand. The rotund voice had a curious sort of break on some tones that frightened me.

He was reading "in course," and the first words that entered my ears were these:

"'On the twelfth day, Ahira, the son of Enan, prince of the children of Naphtali, offered.

"'His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was a hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering.

"'One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense—'"

Uncle Archie and I sat down quietly on the top step. One of the old dogs crept mutely up to us and crouched on his haunches, his muzzle on Uncle Archie's knee. In a plantation of cedars to the left of the lawn a wood-dove moaned fitfully in the still sultriness that had assumed the occupation of the young day. Captain

Macon finished the morning lesson, announced it to be "the seventh chapter of the book of Numbers," and closed the Bible.

"We will sing the two hundred and fourth of the 'Village Hymns,' pursued the hortatory accents.

> "'My soul doth magnify the Lord,
> My spirit doth rejoice
> In GOD—my Saviour and my GOD;
> I hear His joyful voice.'"

He gave it out, two lines at a time, and sang it to the tune of St. Martin's, beating time on the table with his left hand.

Then he said, "Let us pray!" and we heard him kneel slowly and with difficulty, as a lame man might. Uncle Archie removed his hat and leaned his forehead on his clasped hands. I shut my eyes, resting my cheek on his knee. It was the most pathetic act of worship I have ever witnessed, taken in connection with the deserted rooms that echoed every note of the cracked voice with ostentatious distinctness, as in mockery of the contrast between the exulting words and the singer's desolation.

The prayer was long and deliberately enunciated. He abated nothing of his ornate phraseology in the Master's audience-chamber. He adored the "LORD of lords and KING of kings;" confessed "our manifold sins and transgressions," returned thanks for the "miracle of multiplied and undeserved mercies, new every morning, and descending like plenteous dew with the going down of every sun," and supplicated the Divine blessing on "all classes and conditions of Adam's race still groaning from the Fall—ground into the dust by their own sins and the weight of transmitted and inherited iniquity."

Thus far he had gone on evenly with the freedom of

one who had often rehearsed his part. When he began to pray for his neighbors and friends, his tones mellowed; when he named the "children absent in pursuit of health," it was the earthly parent talking with the heavenly. He prayed that "the medicinal fount they had sought might be to the sick girl even as Bethesda when stirred by the angel's tread," and that the "brother who accompanied her might be led by the sight of her patience under suffering, her abiding faith in the love and wisdom of the Divine Arbiter in all human concerns to yield his heart and life in reasonable service to the Master." That the "absent student might be strengthened, body and mind, for his arduous labors, might walk humbly yet firmly in the steps of the Great Physician who had poured out His blood that to a dying world it might become the Elixir of Eternal Life."

He faltered on the next petition. It was for the "poor wanderer from home and kindred in the lead of passion and falsehood." He besought that she might be shielded from all manner of evil, but especially from sin, and "if it be consistent with the economy of Thy grace and justice, that the sight of her, contrite and loving, may yet be granted to these aged eyes ere they close upon all sublunary things."

"Thou knowest, O Lord!"—the shaking voice rising into a cry of pain—"that we made her our idol; that she was the chiefest among ten thousand in our sight; that she was all fair and there was no spot in her; a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters. Thou didst take away the desire of our eyes with a stroke, and our hurt is not healed—"

The cry sank into a murmur, the murmur into silence—broken presently by deep sobs—the terrible weeping of a broken-hearted old man.

I could bear it no longer. Rushing down the steps and through garden alleys, I did not stop until I threw myself, breathless, face downward, on the ground in the cedar grove. I cried out to the deaf trees that this was my work; that if the father died of his hurt I had helped murder him by withholding the warning I could have given in season to hinder his child's flight. I wondered if this might not be the unpardonable sin—this helping on the commission of a wrong no mortal power could undo.

When I had wept myself into exhaustion that was not composure, I sat up, my arms enwrapping my knees, and looked about me in listless wretchedness. Beyond the cedars was a spring, with a grotto of rude masonry over it, built into a hill at the back. Under a dry-leaved oak shadowing the "spring branch" was a fire, a monstrous kettle set on stones above it. A flat rock supported a tub of steaming clothes, which a woman was washing. She was tall, sinewy and black, and her gown of unbleached "domestic" left neck and arms bare. She had pulled off her shoes and stockings and hung them on a bush. As she scrubbed with fist and palm, and wrung out the cleansed linen with energy that threw into high relief the muscles of wrists and arms, she sang merrily a plantation song, with this chorus:

> "'O young ladies, ain't you mighty sorry?
> De sun mos' down, an' I gwine away to-morry.'"

Then she struck into another air loudly, rubbing faster to keep time to the changed measure:

> "'O say, dear doctor, ken you tell
> What will make my sweetheart well?
> She am sick an' I are solly,
> Dat 's what makes me mulloncholy!'"

In the busy intervals of her singing I heard two col-

ored children lying on the hillside, propped by their elbows, their mouths near the earth, calling in sweet monotone:

> "'Doodle-bug! doodle-bug! doodle-bug!
> Come an' git some batter-bread!'"

The "doodle" is a flat-headed beetle of the ant-eater family. He digs a conical pit in sandy or friable soil, and hides himself in the bottom under a coverlet of dust to await his prey. The breath of the caller or the vibration of the sides of the pit dislodges particles of the loose earth, which, falling down, deceive the tenant into the belief that an ant has slipped into the trap. He emerges from his lair to secure the victim, revealing his shovel-shaped snout and ugly black body to the exorcists above.

Uncle Archie had told me why the consonantal summons brought him up. I smiled faintly now in superior wisdom at the silly creatures who fancied that an ant-eater cared for batter-bread. The air grew hotter and stiller; the woman's ditties subsided into wordless crooning; the dove's moan was just audible from the deeper recesses of the grove. The children had happened upon a colony of "doodles," and kept on calling without the variation of a semitone. A cloud like a puff of bituminous smoke, no bigger than a man's hand, topped a distant hill. I lay back on the tawny pillow of cedar leaves, and, from a stern sense of duty, tried to be miserable again. When Uncle Archie hunted me up to tell me that he had accepted Captain Macon's invitation to breakfast, I was fast asleep, and the cloud on the hill was swelling slowly and darkly toward the zenith.

By the time we rode into the outer plantation gate of Summerfield, we urged our horses to a run, as did

the charioteer of Ahab when Elijah, with girt loins, outran him to the entrance of Jezreel.

"For the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain."

CHAPTER XX.

AUNT BETSEY was a pronounced National Republican—the party that about this date began to be known as "Whig." Amid the winds and surges of anti-Masonic, Democratic, Secession and Nullification principles and heresies, she held her helm hard and disdained to veer or tack. She could argue clearly in favor of Internal Improvements, Protection and the Bank; was conversant with the rights and wrongs of the Cherokee case, and "did not wonder so much at Jackson's behavior when she remembered his origin. He came of a very low family. Mr. Clay was born as poor, but his blood was *clean*. Poverty, in itself, was no disgrace in the eyes of the Lord or in those of sensible men. But the dullest observer must see in looking at the rival candidates that one was a gentleman by descent and education, while the other—well, he couldn't have been anything *but* a Democrat, without flying in the face of Providence!"

When, therefore, a National Republican or Whig barbecue was to be held at the county court house the second week in October, and ladies were "respectfully and cordially invited to honor the occasion with their presence," our petticoated patriot saw nothing improper or strange in the innovation upon received customs. Courteous consideration for the sex was characteristic of her party. If not another woman in the neighbor-

hood accepted the invitation, she would go alone, sure of being treated with chivalrous attention.

Her resolution was not put to this test. Far and near, matrons and maidens caught eagerly at the chance of supporting by their presence and smiles the Cause cherished in their hearts. With Nullification growling at her feet and the Executive whip hissing about her ears, Virginia was more than uneasy. There were elements of responsive turbulence in her own bosom that would down at the bidding of but one man. Twelve years later the state that had given him birth rallied her best forces as gallantly and more hopefully than now, to lift him to the place for which she believed him to have been born—to be a second time defeated by an unfortunate division of the Whig party on side issues. In the present contest, some Whigs were sanguine; all were in deadly earnest. Many maintained, with Aunt Betsey, that the existence of the Federal union depended upon Clay's election. The talk that sounded like newly-formulated treason in 1861, the open declarations that Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina would never suffer the passage through their territory of "coercive" troops bound for South Carolina, was blatant among the groups that stood within earshot of the "ladies' seats" on the day of the barbecue.

The place of convocation was a grove of oaks and hickories on the outskirts of the little shire-town. The Summerfield carriage, containing Aunt Betsey, Aunt Maria and myself, was early on the ground, and Uncle Archie, after seating the others, took me by the hand and led me off to see the preparations for dinner. Long tables, constructed of boards nailed on wooden "horses" or trestles, and draped with white, were ranged on level ground among the trees on the top of a gentle eminence that fell away to a spring and "branch," the centre of

culinary operations. Colored women were preparing vegetables for boiling and chickens for frying; colored men were tending the barbecued meats. Oblong pits, looking disagreeably like shallow graves, had been filled overnight with billets of solid hickory, and kept burning until, by morning, each excavation was floored with a thick layer of live coals. Sticks of hard, seasoned white-oak were laid across the mouth, and whole sheep, young pigs ("shoats"), calves, and huge quarters of beef were roasted thereupon to a perfection of juiciness and flavor unattainable by any other method of cookery.

Grave and jovial planters superintended the process in person. Roderick Macon was a connoisseur in the matter of basting, and had a nice eye for the proper shade of brown on leg and loin. Ronald Craig, red-faced and consequential, watched the packing in a mammoth iron pot of the ingredients of a Brunswick stew.

"I spent a month in Brunswick County once on purpose to get the exact knack of the thing," he expatiated to Uncle Archie as we paused beside him in our rounds. "And if I do say it that shouldn't say it, there ain't many men in the state who understand the business better. I told Mr. Archer when he asked me to oversee the Brunswick stew to-day that by George! it wasn't a matter for overseeing, but for work and brains. *Brains*, sir! That's the secret of such a stew as this will be! Why, sir, I've worked like a dog, mentally and physically, for three weeks to get the materials together. Fifty squirrels, twenty onions, twenty quarts of butter-beans, five dozen ears of green corn (went thirty miles to find some that was planted late enough to be fit for use now), ten pounds of butter, ten quarts of tomatoes (sent to Richmond for *them*!), sixty potatoes, ten pounds of pork (sweet as a nut!), twenty gal-

lons of water! There ain't another pot in a hundred miles that would hold it all. This is an heir-loom in our family, and the stew that comes out of it to-day will be something to be remembered when people have forgotten who was elected President of the United States!"

The broad complacency of his smile went out abruptly before reverential decorum—he took off his hat with a bow.

"Captain Macon! good-morning, sir! A fine day for our meeting, sir!"

The Captain had a new red coat for the occasion, also a glistening satin stock. His ruffled shirt bosom was a snowy *cheveaux-de-frise* of political integrity. But crispness, gloss and color could not restore vigor to his figure or alertness to carriage and feature. His eyes were dull, the drooping muscles about the lids and the mouth flaccid. The whole organism had been too far overstrained ever to be keyed up again.

He shook hands with Ronald kindly. If the young fellow had won his peerless Harry he would perhaps have hated him for binding up her fate with that of a rich fool. Now theirs was a common loss that dignified the rejected suitor in the father's sight.

"He has clean hands and an honest heart, at any rate," he had once remarked to Uncle Archie, "and comes of good stock!"

He patted my head with his left hand, and laid the tremulous right on Uncle Archie's shoulder.

"We could not have more glorious weather, Mr. Craig. God grant it may be an augury of the triumph of the right!"

"Amen!" responded the young men, and all three raised their hats.

"We are bound to come out all straight, Captain,"

added Mr. Craig confidently. "One term has showed the American people what Old Hickory is. They 'll be glad enough to take timber from the Hanover Slashes.* You 'll see, sir."

"It may be so, Mr. Craig! it may be so! But I am not sanguine in my expectations of so speedy and satisfactory a solution of our national problems, our manifold complications. The element of hope is wanting from my prognostications of late, but there may be a natural reason for that. Timidity is an inevitable concomitant of decrepitude."

Ronald turned aside and spoke sharply to a servant who was slicing tomatoes. We moved away with the Captain in the direction of the stand and the rapidly-filling seats.

The benches prepared for the ladies were covered with white cotton cloth, and directly in front of the rude rostrum. The day was as still and warm as June, but more bracing; the air was sweet with the odor of dying leaves. Many of the younger women wore white gowns; the marshals and ushers sported fluttering streamers of pale-blue satin ribbon stamped in silver with a medallion head of Clay. At the right and left of the stand were planted poles bearing the national colors. Smaller flags—the ensigns of National Republican Clubs and Clay Leagues—decorated the rail separating leaders from listeners. There had been reckless whispers of having a band up from town, but this, it was thought, would hazard the loss of plain, economical voters, already disposed to hearken to the talk of aristocratic pretensions on the part of those who would wrest the rule from Democratic fists. The exercises were, accordingly, opened in the usual manner. When Captain Macon, the chairman of the Committee of Ar-

* Clay's birthplace—now "Ashland," in Hanover County, Virginia.

rangements, advanced to the edge of the platform, the hum of laughter and of talk was stilled; all eyes turned to the stately figure in scarlet. His bowed shoulders straightened as he felt the general gaze; his voice was stronger as he went on with the deliberate utterances that had something of the olden roll and resonance:

"As in individual emprise, so in the crises of national life—man is a puny impersonation of conceit and impotency, without the guidance of Divine Wisdom. It therefore behooves us, before entering upon the debate of the momentous questions that have called us hither this day, first of all to invoke the presence, the blessing and the gracious guidance of ALMIGHTY GOD. Our prayer to this effect will be led by the Reverend Mr. Burgess of this county."

It was a very long prayer—a very stupid one to my comprehension, and tame to tedium after the flowing sentences that introduced our worthy pastor. For ten minutes he stood, eyes tight-shut; fingers, joined at the tips, pointing outward from wrists resting on the pit of his stomach; occasionally rising on his toes as if likely to be blown aloft in the draught of devotion. He prayed for the world at large, for the Western Continent, for the United States, for the State of Virginia, for our particular county, for our neighborhood, for those who should speak and those who should hear—that they might have attentive ears and applying consciences; finally and unctuously, that an influence might go abroad from that meeting that would extend throughout earth's remotest bounds.

Captain Macon had another announcement ready when "Amen" had set the audience upright again.

"In the calm consciousness that a righteous cause must be strengthened, rather than weakened, by the fair discussion of the fundamental principles involved in its

maintenance—the National Republicans of this Congressional District have invited the Honorable John Winston Jones, widely and favorably known as a gentleman of irreproachable character and marked ability, to represent his party—the Democratic—here to-day. The debate will be opened by our distinguished guest, the Honorable Waddy Thompson, of South Carolina. At the conclusion of his address the collation will be served in the grove. The banquet over, Mr. Jones will merit and receive your most respectful attention, and the closing speech will be delivered by the Honorable Watkins Leigh, of Richmond. I know that I but voice —and all too feebly—the sentiments of this audience when I say that we were never more happy to see this gentleman than now that his legal acumen and eminent oratorical powers are at the service of the party which claims at this juncture the patriot's sympathies, his labors and his prayers, to secure the triumph of which some of us would even dare to *die!*"

They gave him three thunderous rounds of applause —the gallant old war-horse who had answered the trumpet's call by showing himself in the forefront of the battle. Many women raised their handkerchiefs to their eyes. I felt the sob Aunt Betsey could not stifle, and saw Aunt Maria quietly wipe a tear from her cheek. Then—I forgot everything else in the excitement of beholding Captain Macon shake both hands of one of a company of gentlemen who had just arrived upon the ground. They were a delegation from Richmond, and the portly guest who was laughing and nodding upward at his taller friend was Major Dabney.

I remember nothing of Waddy Thompson's two hours' speech except that he compared Van Buren's efforts to gain the summit of party power to the tortuous windings of a snake up the tree, the topmost bough

of which Jackson, the eagle, had reached in one bold flight. I recollect that the dinner was profuse, informal and very merrily enjoyed; that Mr. Jones seemed to me prosy and dull, probably because I knew he was a Democrat; that Mr. Leigh halted in his gait and was very witty in his demolition of his predecessor's arguments. But I preserve a distinct mental record of the incidents with which the public exercises closed.

"Captain Algernon S. Macon" was the first name read by the secretary of the meeting from a paper bearing the list of nominated delegates to a grand party rally in Richmond.

Before a vote could be taken, Captain Macon was on his feet, his hand raised in dissent and entreaty.

"Fellow-citizens of ——— County! my friends and neighbors! I am an old man! Above the portals of my brain the almond tree bends a weight of blossoms. The grasshopper has become a burden; I am afraid of that which is high, and fears are in the way in which I once ran and was not weary. This earthly house of my tabernacle is no longer stanch; the keepers thereof tremble, and the strong men bow themselves toward the long home which cannot be far off. I acknowledge with a full heart fervently the many, many tokens of confidence and affection of which I have been, for almost half a century, the grateful recipient. I have been your unworthy servant in the battle-field, on the magistrate's bench, in your legislative halls. Most heartily and humbly do I thank you for this latest evidence of your trust at a season when you should select instruments of finest temper to do the work of the nation. But I came to this convocation to-day to bid you farewell—to lay off the armor, not to buckle on the sword my arm has grown too weak to wield."

He was interrupted by cries of "No! no!" Men

arose in different parts of the crowd to utter protest. A majestic wave of the long arm enforced silence. He reiterated his refusal, making it very plain that there was no appeal. Then he craved leave to appoint a delegate in his stead, and being answered by an affirmative acclamation, spoke of "a countyman of your own. One of whom it may be affirmed with truth and emphasis, that when his word is given no bond or oath could make the obligation stronger to his conscience; a man, who to stainless probity unites strong sense, clear perceptions and just judgment; a Christian gentleman, who has gone in and out among you from his boyhood, unconsciously exemplifying the highest type of manhood, visiting the widow and the fatherless in their affliction, and keeping himself unspotted from the world. A patriot, ingrain—unflinching and incorruptible, whose actions always outrun his words in the ways of truth and uprightness; who would defend the right and resist the wrong to the last drop of blood poured into his veins, through clean channels, from an honorable ancestry.

"Fellow-citizens! That community is blessed, indeed, that can boast more than one denizen who, in the early prime of manhood, possesses and manifests characteristics and endowments such as I have enumerated. While I have been speaking, I doubt not that each of my intelligent auditors has anticipated that I shall present as a substitute for my unworthy name on the list of representatives, to be sent from this respectable assembly to the National Republican Convention to be holden in Richmond, on the last week in this month—that of my dear and honored friend, ARCHIBALD READ, ESQ., OF SUMMERFIELD!"

How they huzzaed and clapped! How Aunt Betsey cried behind her handkerchief, while every fibre of my

corporate being tingled with excitement! Uncle Archie tried to utter some sentences of disclaim from the side of the platform, but his intention was anticipated, and the effort foiled by a clamorous storm of applause. Captain Macon's motion was put by one of the Committee of Management and carried unanimously, Major Dabney joining vociferously in the plaudits that followed the vote.

An incident, trivial in itself, but which takes deeper meaning as I look back upon it, occurred on our way home.

A wild Passion-flower vine grew in a certain fence-corner on the edge of a body of pines between the Cross-Roads and Summerfield. I had gathered the blossoms every summer since I was a baby, and latterly studied with awe the mystic symbolism of petals and stamens under Aunt Betsey's and Mrs. Hemans' tutelage. We had nearly passed the spot to-day before I observed it from the carriage window.

"Oh, Uncle Archie!" I called: "Won't you please see if there are any Passion-balls there? I haven't had one this year."

The coachman reined in his horses while our escort alighted, and, throwing the bridle over his arm, searched for the coveted "balls." Stem, leaves and tendrils were limp and blackened by a light frost, and he descried, the more readily on this account, four or five egg-shaped fruits, greenish in color and tough of skin.

They were very palatable to me—more, I fancy, because they grew wild and that I had never seen them anywhere except in this piney nook, than because the flavor was really pleasant. The pulp had an odd acid-sweet taste, which Aunt Betsey complained left a "tang" on her tongue.

"They taste better than those I had last year," re-

marked I, relishfully. "Do you suppose the drouth made them sweeter?"

"More likely the frost improved the flavor."

"I thought frost killed things!"

"Sometimes it mellows and sweetens them. Why, I don't quite understand, only that it is the Lord's will and way that this should be."

Aunt Maria took a Passion-ball from my lap and studied it silently, as we drove along toward the sunsetting. By-and-by she touched it almost tenderly with a finger-tip as it lay in the palm of her hand; her faint, sweet smile said that she owed it a precious thought or a lesson.

"Why," asked I that evening, "did they halloo 'A Read! A Read!' Because A stands for Archie?"

With all his regard for my sensitive feelings Uncle Archie laughed while he explained that it was the usual form of popular call on one whom the people wished to have serve them by speech or action.

"Of course," mused Aunt Betsey aloud, "it was only what might have been expected, and what Archibald richly deserves, but I must say I have seldom been more gratified. And I *do* consider that Captain Macon's address was perfect of its kind—the most eloquent delivered to-day. That man's command of language is akin to inspiration."

Brother and sister exchanged smiles unseen by the speaker, who went on unperturbed.

"But Sister Judith! our friend is breaking up fast! He begins to look like an old man, although he is not sixty-three until December. It was touching to hear him speak of his 'decrepitude.' Ah, sorrow undermines constitutions more quickly than age!"

"We are none of us young," responded Grandma, serenely. "But old age has compensations that are

pleasures if we use them aright. My son! *this* old lady is a little stiff to-night!"

We were rising from the supper-table, and he hastened to offer his arm. In taking it she glanced up proudly.

"One of these is the advantage of having so strong and tall a boy to lean upon!"

A clear fire blazed and crackled on the dining-room hearth. The October evenings were growing cool. Grandma's white-knitted shawl hung on the back of her tall rocking-chair, and Uncle Archie folded it about her; then, obeying the impulse of her hand, stooped to kiss her mutely.

"My *good* boy!" was all she said.

I caught the glisten of moisture under his eyelids as he turned away. Neither of them was ever effusive, and this episode awed me into thoughtful silence. There was little need of words or of caresses between two who understood one another so perfectly.

It seemed so soon after this night that the pictures blend without visible separation lines, that we four—Grandma, Aunt Betsey, Aunt Maria and I—sat quietly in the same place at the same hour of the evening. But the fire was larger and brighter, the wind hummed in the chimney and whistled storm-signals outside of the windows. I had that afternoon put on a winter frock for the first time, a brown stuff, known as "Circassian," high in the neck, long-sleeved and long-skirted. My hair was just long enough to be put behind my ears, and was turned back from my forehead by a round comb. I was privately vain of my genteel appearance, esteeming the crimped ruffles of neck and wrists the acme of youthful elegance. Still I must have looked but a demure elf—a sort of sepia sketch, pale lights thrown up by brown shadows—as I sat upright on a cricket against

the mantel-jamb and regaled my olfactories with Aunt Betsey's gold-mounted snuff-box. I liked to do this when there was nothing in it but the tonqua bean, which gave to the tortoise-shell sides the true vanilla fragrance—precisely the perfume that enchants us when exhaled by the pond-lily. Gentlewomen took snuff at that day, and so gracefully as to disgust nobody. The tap of the delicate forefinger on the enameled or jeweled lid was susceptible of as many varying expressions as the Spectator's "fan-exercise," and even the application of the aromatic powder to the nostrils was effected daintily.

"November comes in roughly," remarked Grandma, breaking the silence consequent upon turning off the heel of her lamb's-wool sock. "I wish Archibald had taken his surtout with him."

"Young blood is warm," rejoined Aunt Betsey consolingly. "And he is very hardy. I hope, however, that he will come before his supper is spoiled by waiting. Peggy won't bake the waffles until she has orders, but good coffee is injured by standing long on the grounds and by over-boiling. I suppose it wouldn't hurt *cheap* coffee or tea—such as the country will be flooded with if the duties are taken off of foreign goods."

"I thought Uncle Archie went down to Richmond to keep them from electing General Jackson!" said I, alarmed.

"Ah, my child! no man can, single-handed, beat back such a woe as that! It does seem as if our poor country had been sufficiently punished, but the Lord knows best. If it is His will that this awful judgment shall overtake the nation, we must bow under His chastening. Archie and all other good patriots will do their best, but my heart misgives me as the election draws near."

Aunt Maria diverted her thoughts from public to private sorrows.

"Mammy tells me that Di Macon is failing steadily. We must go over to-morrow to see what we can do for her. I wrote to Captain Macon this morning, offering to sit up whenever they may need me."

"I wonder if they have tried rusty nails and cider!" said Aunt Betsey anxiously. "Or snake-root and honey for her cough! I will take a bottle of cherry-bounce and some of my hoarhound bitters when we go. Some wafers and chicken-broth, too. There 's no use in feeding sick people with home victuals. A biscuit baked in a neighbor's kitchen has a different flavor from one cooked in one's own house. It 's strange how consumption runs in some families! Mrs. Macon died of it, and her mother, so I 've heard, and a sister, and here 's poor Diana! How mysterious are the ways of Providence!"

Heredity was an unused word in her generation, and the altogether natural transmission of diseases from parent to child esteemed as little more than an old wives' fable. Providence got the credit of such calamities, along with earthquake, drouth and freshet.

As the pious soul laid this new burden upon the Great Abstraction, the door leading into the back porch opened and Uncle Archie stood before us. His clothes were plentifully besprinkled with wet, his wrappers red with mire thrown up by his horse's hoofs. But he had never been handsomer; his eyes were bright, his complexion was fresh, his smile sunny and genial. The ring of his voice put heart and cheer into all. He had ridden directly to the stable, he said, to get his horse under shelter. A genuine November storm was coming on. He had left our Richmond friends well; the convention adjourned yesterday; he would tell Aunt Betsey

all the political news when he had been to his room to get rid of the mud.

He fulfilled the promise with the same merry affectionateness while we sat long over the evening meal. He could not say that he really expected to see Mr. Clay elected, although he wished it more fervently than ever. The split in the party would, he feared, prove fatal to their hopes of success. Still, there was no saying what would happen. It was certain that the Democrats would not have so easy a victory as at Jackson's first election. Yes! he had filled Aunt Betsey's memorandum. The articles purchased would be up in a wagon that left Richmond that morning. There was a letter in his saddle-bags for Aunt Maria from Miss Virginia. His voice sank on the name, and a queer little pause ensued. But he did not offer to produce the letter then, or when, the servants having cleared off the table, let down the leaves, set it away against the back of the room and left us to ourselves. He laid more wood on the fire, settling log steadily upon log, opened a draught in the deep bed of coals under the forestick with the tongs, and seated himself, holding out his hand invitingly to me—his face as clear as a summer morning.

"Come and sit on my knee, Judith!"

I nestled within the curve of his arm in content unspeakable until I discovered that his heart beat hard and he drew long, irregular breaths at intervals, as if to lift some pressure from it or the lungs. I sat up straight and looked in his face—an apology for leaning so heavily against him trembling on my tongue. Before it escaped he began to speak, his throat contracting visibly at each pause:

"Mother—Aunt Betsey!—Maria! I have something else to tell you; something that is more to me than

political intelligence; something which will, I know, interest and please you. I am to be married on the twenty-second of next month—her birthday—to Virginia Dabney!"

CHAPTER XXI.

STRANGELY enough, the central figure in my retrospect of the scenes immediately preceding Uncle Archie's wedding day is not himself, but Aunt Maria. Aunt Betsey was the busiest of the busy, superintending the tearing up and putting down, the routing and cleansing that were decreed to be absolutely essential to the preparation of the ancient homestead for the reception of the bride. Major Dabney sent up a carpet and furniture for his daughter's room that were the marvel of the plantation and the staple of neighborhood gossip for a week. Under the vigilant supervision of the task-mistress this was settled satisfactorily in the wing chamber, whereof every inch was made clean, sweet and bright with scrubbing-brush and old home-made soap.

Curtains, wrought elaborately by Grandma's hand for her own bridal chamber, had lain in lavendered darkness for twenty years, awaiting this auspicious day. They were drawn from the deepest caverns of the great blue chest in the garret, brought, with much pomp and circumstance, down to the dining-room and spread out on the big table at length and breadth, yellow as saffron with age, soft and fine of texture, and heavy with embroidery. A committee of the whole, consisting of Grandma, Aunt Betsey, Aunt Maria and Mammy, examined and pronounced them sound in every part, and good for a score more years.

"It 's f'ar, of course, that Mars' Archibald's wife should have 'em," said Mammy slowly. "But I *had* 'lotted 'pon their fallin' to Miss Maria's sheer o' worldly goods. Daughters valler sech things more'n daughters-in-law. It 's boun' for to be so, long 's blood is thicker'n water.

> "'A daughter 's a daughter all the days of her life,
> But a son 's a son till he gits him a wife.'"

Aunt Maria had stooped to inspect a frayed thread in the button-holed border of a grape leaf.

"Mother! a stitch is needed here before the curtains are washed. I am glad Virginia is to have them. If I had ever married I should have taken them away from Summerfield. I shall stay here always—but that makes no difference. Virginia ought to have them. I will get a needle and thread and look them over again."

She went out.

Mammy pursed her lips; her turban executed a discreet little nod. She only said:

"Ain't you afeerd, Mistis, that Miss Maria is a-settin' up too steady with Miss Diana Macon?"

"She is paler than I like to see her," returned the mother. "Her brother and I were speaking of it last night. But we agreed that since poor Diana cannot last much longer it would be cruel to object to her having the comfort of her friend's society and nursing."

"The greatest earthly comfort she has," said Aunt Betsey. "And who can wonder she feels it to be such? It *is* a privilege and a blessing to be ministered to by such a woman. She grows in grace and the fruits of the Spirit every day."

"'Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,'" repeated Mammy, as if to herself. "Do you think, Miss Betsey, it 's quite nat'ral for young folks to sanctify so fast? 'Taint

the Lord's common way o' dealin' even with the elect, it seems to me. Fruit ain't apt to be ripe to the core early in the summer."

"I have thought that, perhaps"—Aunt Betsey brought herself up with a side glance in my direction, felt by its object the while I appeared to be intent upon my slate and arithmetic in the chimney-corner. I knew also from the change in her voice that she smiled.

"No!" I comprehended, too, without looking up, that Grandma's gesture was dissentient and emphatic. "I should be surprised at *that*. Her interest in Diana is not heightened by any such motive. Poor Harry was her favorite in the Macon family."

So, Sidney Macon's devotion to my sweet aunt was unavailing, except as it deepened her life-long friendship into sisterly kindness!

When he drove over for her that afternoon, as he did three times each week, to take her to Hunter's Rest for the night, I contrived to be lingering about the gate. He escorted her down the walk, and when she stopped to kiss me, picked up the sun-bonnet I dropped, standing by and holding it in his hand while she bade me "be a good girl, and not lie awake late because she was not with me."

"You must forgive me for carrying her off," said Sidney, more affably than he was used to speak to children. Generally he hardly seemed to see me. "But we need her sadly—just now!"

My alert ear and imagination caught and interpreted the slight pause separating the last two words from the rest of the sentence. My heart swelled with mingling pity and resentment. He was well enough in his place. Looking at the haggard lines in his dark, handsome face, I could forgive his severity toward the sister he had loved and lost. But violence was needed to

bring my thoughts to set his image beside that of the pale, pure saint whom he helped to her seat in the double gig, folding a shawl over her feet and adjusting a cushion at her back before he got in himself. It was easy to believe that she would never change name or state, but remain at Summerfield until the dark hair was white and old age refined into graver placidity the face others besides Aunt Betsey thought lovelier every day.

She did not come home next morning. A messenger rode over at sunrise to let us know that Diana Macon had let go the last strand of the life which had been slipping from her hold since she was a tall, fragile girl of fourteen. Hers was, at the best, a passive, nerveless nature. She had not struggled to maintain vitality. One might have fancied that Harry's redundant individuality had fed upon and sapped her sister's strength. Still the shy, inoffensive sufferer had many friends in a community where pain, patiently borne, commanded respectful sympathy. The funeral, held, as was the country custom, on the day succeeding that of death, was largely attended. The summons had been sent to relatives and friends within a radius of twenty-five miles. Aunt Betsey had gone to Hunter's Rest as soon as the news was received, and remained there with Aunt Maria until the obsequies were over.

Grandma, Mammy and I occupied the carriage which turned out of the Summerfield gate into the public road at twelve o'clock, and Uncle Archie rode beside it. We had had a cold luncheon; the house was as still all day as if the awful guest had entered our doors. Grandma was unusually silent and thoughtful. Mammy had donned her bombazine and a huge black poke-bonnet of age and portentousness immemorial and indescribable; a small black silk frock which had been Aunt Maria's,

then kept for state mourning, was unfolded for my wear. To sport colors at a funeral would have been reckoned unfeeling and indecorous. I had never attended one before, nor within my memory looked upon the dead, excepting a pretty little mulatto baby—Mammy's grandchild—lying in a breathless sleep in its cradle.

There was little said as we drove on under bare boughs, the dead leaves up to the fetlocks of the horses in the road—nothing that could have lifted the cold pressure, like that of a dead hand, from my heart. Under the weight I sighed often, involuntarily and hysterically. Mammy, on the front seat, kept her eyes cast down upon her black-mittened hands, as grand and solemn as an Egyptian statue. Grandma's fingers were folded more lightly, her gaze went out of the windows to the soft gray sky seen through forest vistas and from rising ground beyond other hills. The fields were brown and crossed by lines of tobacco-stubs and gaunt, bare cornstalks, stripped of grain and fodder. The pallid sereness of the country was the work of drouth, not of frost, therefore, and in itself unspeakably dreary. Even the broom-straw and "hen's-nest grass" of the "old fields," exhausted by bearing and resigned to the slow recuperative agencies of Nature, were bleached into lifeless dinginess. Indian summer haze and drowsiness slept in the hollows and veiled the horizon-line. It was as if Nature had turned her faded, wrinkled cheek to that wall to die as listlessly as the consumptive girl we were going to bury had breathed her last. With another sigh, so heavy that it hurt me, I fell to watching Uncle Archie. He sat easily and firmly in the saddle, the reins loose on his horse's neck, as the blooded hunter picked his way on the edge of the road so close to the trees that the rider bowed his head instinctively every few minutes to avoid the lowest limbs, while he

seemed to gaze straight ahead. Was he thinking of his own bridal, now less than a month off, or of the heaven where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage? Or were he and my other companions following my musings of the long-absent, mysteriously-silent daughter of the stricken home?

"Grandma!"—the exclamation burst from me against my will, yet was scarcely louder than a dry whisper—"isn't Miss Diana a great deal better off than Miss Harry *now?*"

"Better off than any of us, dear!"

Uncle Archie looked around quickly, rode up nearer.

"I suppose that is true, mother! I *know* it is. But does God mean us to feel it? It is a hard saying!"

"I hope and pray that it will be long before you can say with heart and tongue, 'Amen!' to it," was the rejoinder. "At my time of life such thoughts and talk come naturally to the tongue."

Then the Indian summer quiet again reigned about us. Grandma was always right. So was Uncle Archie when he called hers, "a hard saying."

Aunt Maria met us at the door with a silent kiss. There were no signs of tears on her face, but a holy calm and tenderness ineffable that accounted to me in some indefinable way for the composure of father and brothers. We were among the first arrivals, and the three men sitting together in the drawing-room arose at our entrance, advanced a few steps to receive their best neighbor. She gave both hands to Captain Macon.

"She is forever with the Lord! There is another to welcome us to the many mansions when our turn comes."

"I would not recall one of them, my dear madam! The Judge of all the earth has done right in this as in all things else. Blessed be His holy name!"

Sidney wrung Uncle Archie's hand without trying to speak. Roderick's voice shook very slightly in the exchange of salutations. Mammy led me by the hand up to the open coffin, which was covered with black cloth and rested on two tall stools. A mass of straight white drapery filled it. Glossy cambric, notched and scalloped at the edges, was turned over with sedulous stiffness along the sides of the coffin, and folded at the upper end into two broad, flat scarfs that swept the floor. Amid this glacial stillness lay the white shell from which the spirit had fluttered yesternight. Somebody whispered that she "looked very natural." To me, the peaceful beauty of the face was unnatural and unearthly. At the best of her young womanhood she had been a pretty, pensive shadow in a home where marked personal characteristics were the rule, and she was an exception. With the cessation of physical pain, the tense lines of the mouth and between the brows had relaxed into a half smile as of pleased surprise at the relief from the long strain. On the marble forehead the death-seal which dignifies the commonest features was a majesty of calm it was not possible to associate with memories of the living countenance. The hands, pearly and almost translucent, were crossed at the wrists and bound in this position with white satin ribbon. Her shroud was of the same material as the winding-sheet, and was notched—or "pinked"—down the front and on the ruffles of neck and sleeves. Bows of stiff ribbon fastened it from throat to feet, the latter being covered with silk stockings and satin slippers. On the breast of the moveless figure lay a single white lily, the gold-dusted stamen and green stalk the only relief to the dreadful whiteness.

The piano, the tables, the pictures, the windows were draped with linen sheets, as straight and smooth as the

burial garments. The outer blinds were closed, and the colorless light showed an increasing and silent throng of black-robed forms. If a chair creaked, or a boot-heel scraped on the oaken floor, the sound cut harshly into the brooding hush which gathered weight and depth from an occasional sigh poured into it from some sympathizing heart that could keep it in no longer. Through the open front door we heard the horses tethered at the racks and fences pawing the turf, the suppressed tones of the colored coachmen in waiting with the empty carriages. The rear windows gave upon the long back porch crowded with servants. At the head of the coffin with father and brothers sat the faithful woman who had nursed Diana from her birth, and in whose arms she had died. A snowy turban capped her wrinkled face; her arms were folded tightly, her eyes closed, and she rocked gently back and forth with the peculiar measured swing known as "weaving," and much affected by her caste in solemn assemblies. Afar off, in the heart of the cedar grove, the turtle-dove, loth to quit her home, mourned for the departed summer, and the threnody was audible to us in the languid pulsing of the hazy noontide.

Mr. Burgess "conducted the exercises," standing just within the parlor door, behind a chair set with the back toward him and the legs outward. In his hand he held a copy of "Village Hymns." His deep voice, breaking the sacred silence, rasped my every nerve raw.

"We will commence the services of this solemn occasion by singing the five hundred and seventy-first hymn:

"'In vain my fancy strives to paint
The moment after death,
The glories that surround the saint
In yielding up his breath.'"

He "gave it out" two lines at a time after reading it through once. A brief pause followed the first couplet. Before it became oppressive, a silvery voice arose from the family group—Aunt Betsey's—in "Dundee's wild warbling measures." Uncle Archie and Aunt Maria joined in promptly. To their sincere souls there was no incongruity in chanting the funeral psalm in the presence of their coffined friend. It was an act of worship, therefore duty. People talked of the scene and the music for a long time afterward.

My gaze could not leave Aunt Maria's face, as slightly upraising her eyes in the white glooms of the room, she sang in thrush-like notes:

> "'Thus much (and this is all) we know,
> Saints are completely blest;
> Have done with sin and care and woe,
> And with their Saviour rest.
>
> "'On harps of gold they praise His name,
> His face they always view,
> Then, let us foll'wers be of them
> That we may praise Him too!'"

Captain Macon's gray head fell on the hands supported by his cane. His frame quivered convulsively in one long respiration, as a tired heart might stretch itself in lying down to rest. The words crept into my mind—"*And Israel worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.*"

> "Have done with sin and care and woe,
> And with their Saviour rest."

Why should this couplet ring with tuneful iteration through my brain during the tedious prayer that ensued? Especially, what spell was there in them to evoke the image of Harry Macon, blithe, beautiful and arch, as she peeped down at me between the horizontal rails on the back of the bench at which I knelt in Old

Singinsville on the Sunday morning ages agone, when she opened her hymn-book upside down on her lap that I might beguile the insufferably weary duration of Mr. Watts' prayer by reading?

Mr. Burgess' text was Balaam's aspiration: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" These words the faithful pastor treated and improved and enlarged upon for a whole hour. When he spoke of the exemplary life and consistent walk of "our departed sister," I hearkened. At other times I dreamed, gazing, in fascination that never diminished, at the marbled visage with its unchanging smile of gentle surprise; at the lily drooping above the stilled heart; at the set, sad lineaments of the trio who were nearest of kin to the wandering daughter of the house and to her who was forever present with the Lord; at Aunt Maria, sitting at Captain Macon's right hand and not removing her eyes from Mr. Burgess' lips, the while I suspected that she heard little more than I. Children at that date sought out many inventions to cheat lagging minutes into swifter movement. In ultra-conscientious spasms I caught up my wandering thoughts and shook them into place; endured grinding conviction for sin in the knowledge that I ought to "follow" the speaker in petition or exhortation. But Ephraim's goodness and the early dew were fixed institutions by comparison with the evanescence of these visitings. At this hour I confess to a lively curiosity to know just how far and how closely my elders and superiors followed the ordained teacher in his stated ministrations. A tougher puzzle is how a sensible, educated Christian wrought upon his conscience to sanction a funeral discourse sixty minutes in length, woven of washed-out platitudes, and cross-barred with Scriptural quotations.

We had another hymn, apropos to the text:

> "How blest the righteous are
> When they resign their breath!
> No wonder Balaam wished to share
> In such a happy death."

Then I heard for the first time the dread announcement that falls upon the heart with the force and pain of a blow on the naked surface:

"The services will be concluded at *the grave!*"

No one could pronounce the formula carelessly at the thousandth repetition. With all his trained mechanism of pious proclamation, Mr. Burgess uttered it with visible reluctance, and a sudden, shuddering breath escaped the crowd in hearing it. I was as one struck sharply in the face. The length and prosiness of the exercises had numbed the keenness of my sensations; the dreamy fit induced by the accustomed round carried me away from the present and the truth.

But the "grave!" the stern "full stop"—the "Finis" from which there was no appeal, and beyond which lay a blank leaf never to be printed while Time endures! Up to that instant I had not thought of it in connection with Miss Diana. I could picture her in heaven, for having known her alive I could not imagine her as "not." This violent removal, from home and sight, of a thing so lovely and helpless as the still-featured girl before me was *cruel!* I clutched Aunt Maria's hand with icy fingers as Captain Macon—"farewell" in eye and gesture—arose and stood over the coffin, looking down into it from one side, his sons from the other, amid silence that could be felt. All sounds from without were suspended save the distant moan of the wood-dove, coming and ebbing like a spent musical echo. My aunt passed an arm about me and held me fast, her hand on my wildly fluttering heart. Neither of us

could withdraw her regards from the standing group until the father bowed to kiss the calm forehead, and his voice, firm and resonant, thrilled through the awful hush:

"Farewell, my daughter, until the Resurrection morning! The God of our fathers, who brought our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from the dead, have you in His holy keeping until then!"

In any other man action and words would have been melodramatic. With him they were nature—and sublime!

I burst into tears and buried my face in Aunt Maria's lap. Many wept aloud with me. Warm drops rained on my neck as a gentle voice begged me to "try not to cry. It is all well with her, Judith, dear. We must not forget this!"

"Better off than any of us!" I recollected, essaying to check my sobs.

The colored nurse and Aunt Betsey lifted the trailing cambric scarfs and drew them tenderly over the face, covering it for the slumber that would endure until the dawn of the Rising Day, disposed them in smooth rigidity over the figure and tucked in the scalloped edges of the sheet. Uncle Archie and two other young men laid on and screwed down the black lid. Captain Macon gave Grandma his arm when the coffin was lifted to the shoulders of the four servants selected by Diana to bear her to the family burying-ground. Roderick offered his to Aunt Betsey, and Sidney raised Aunt Maria's hand to his arm without a word. Uncle Archie took charge of me, and we walked close behind the three couples, the rest winding on after us in a long procession down the back-steps, across the broad lawn and through garden-walks bordered by leafless shrubs, to the God's-acre of the domain. A literal acre, separated from the

garden by a hedge of box, thick and low, and inclosed on three other sides by a brick wall. The ground sloped gently from the garden-level, and was furrowed unevenly by the plowshare of death. There were hundreds of graves, servants and masters, the young and old of five generations having laid their heads on one equal bed to await the final meeting together of rich and poor, bond and free. A group of gravestones near a giant weeping-willow included one erected in memory of "LUCY ANN, BELOVED CONSORT OF ALGERNON SIDNEY MACON." This was Diana's mother, and at her left side gaped a black, hungry-looking pit. A rough pine case was laid on cross-pieces over the mouth. The negro sextons waited near, spade and mattock in hand, but neighbors' hands did what was needful until the encased coffin was lowered to its place. Men stood uncovered, women's faces were wet with tears while they sang the hymn which, I dare affirm, had sounded over every grave opened within the hallowed precincts for a hundred years past:

> "Why should we mourn departing friends
> Or shake at Death's alarms?
> 'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
> To call them to His arms."

The tune was (of course) "China."

The lithe streamers of the willow vibrated in the shout of rapture that upbore the words—

> "Thence, He arose, ascending high,
> And showed our feet the way,
> Up to the Lord we, too, shall fly
> At the Great Rising Day!"

Not one of the singers doubted it. Mr. Burgess' prayer could not quench the exultation of the sure and certain Hope.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It was *very* good in you to ask me to your wedding. Do you know, I never saw anybody married in all my life!"

"Not good at all! It wouldn't be a wedding without you, Sweetbrier!"

I sat in Miss Virginia's lap, wrapped warmly in her arms, and it was the eve preceding her wedding-day. Aunt Maria and Mrs. Dabney were in the store-room together. I had been in the house but two hours, having come to town that day with Uncle Archie and three of his groomsmen, but I already observed how tactfully and effectually Aunt Maria, who had spent the last three weeks with her friend, contrived to draw the spluttering fire of the stepmother's attention and comment from the heroine of the morrow's drama. It had rained all day in cold, sullen showers, each promising more of its kind. The wind was rising now, and sent intermittent gushes of spray against the windows. The soft coal in the grate flamed high and red, and made the only light in the parlor. I was intensely, fearfully happy—excited to loquacity.

"This is too delicious!" I panted from the sweet inclosure of the embrace. "I was dreadfully afraid once that you wouldn't marry Uncle Archie after all. It seems silly now to say it, but I really had a notion that you liked *that* Mr. Allen better than you did him—the Mr. Allen who wore the 'bilibous-green' coat and big watch-seal, and who paid you so much attention."

"Ned Allen! Why, he is odious! The very last man upon the globe that I would have looked at! How did you get that notion into your head, Monkey?"

My cheeks burned.

"I heard you and Miss Harry talking Edward Dunallan one night. Of course I knew he was the hero of a book, but the names were so much alike that I thought you meant him."

"I did not! It was—quite another—a very different person. Try to forget the nonsense we talked and dreamed last winter, Judith, if you love me and want to please me. It turns me sick to remember it. I wish I could cut last winter out from the rest of my life and throw it into the fire there and see it burn away to *nothing!*"

She spoke with passionate acrimony so unlike anything I had ever heard from her before that I was frightened, and sought instinctively for solacing words.

"I don't want to burn up my visit to you! I wouldn't forget if I could how sweet and kind you were to me while I was here. Uncle Archie says you couldn't be unkind to anything or anybody. He told Grandma the other day that he had studied you for years without finding in you a single unamiable or unwomanly trait."

I quoted successfully and complacently.

She pinched my cheek.

"What a mouthful! And telling tales out of school, too! Still I am glad you said it. It helps me to hear such things. It *helps* me," she repeated, looking absently into the fire, and falling into the softly emphatic manner of speech peculiar to her earnest moods. "I *will* try not to disappoint him or his friends. I wish I *were* good enough for him. But I am not what he believes me to be. I am not! I am *not!*"

She put me down and stood up straight on the rug.

rubbing the palms of her hands hard together, her eyes wild and terrified.

"I am not! Sometimes I think I shall lose my senses with thinking of it! Of what he expects and what I can give! And I must go straight on—without looking backward or to the right or left—march right forward—and—be—married—to-morrow!"

She sank to her knees before the chair from which she had arisen, sobbing and crying hysterically. I was paralyzed—afraid to touch her or to call for help. If the prospect of marriage moved this serene embodiment of womanly graces and virtues to madness, Uncle Archie was falsifying the record of his past life by urging it upon her, even by allowing the sacrifice.

"I am sure—" began I timidly, when the sobs abated, "that Uncle Archie would let you off if he knew how you feel. Why don't you beg him to do it? He would be terribly hurt to think he had caused you all this trouble. He 'd rather live without you always than to make you miserable for one hour. Suppose you tell him?"

She was up in an instant, laughing and shaking me by the shoulders.

"You are the funniest, comicalest, delightfulest bit of sweetbrier I ever laid hold of! I shall die some day with laughing at your oddities! 'Beg him to let me off!' Why should I take him—or anybody else—if I don't want him? Is there any reason for my marrying him except the one all women have for changing their names—because they think they can better themselves, as well as make somebody else supremely happy? If you ever breathe a syllable of our talk and my carryings-on this evening, I won't forgive you. Mother had hysterics this morning when I tried on my wedding-dress, and I believe I have caught them. If a girl

can't play the fool the night before she is married, when can she, I would like to know? Now, we will be sensible!"

She pulled me again to her lap and began telling me of the new frock that had been made for me at her dressmaker's. Aunt Maria had brought one of my gowns down with her as a measure, and bought the material in Richmond, a sort of *crêpe lisse*, trimmed with white silk ruffles.

"And there are the prettiest satin slippers, with rosettes, and silk stockings to be worn with them—all white, of course," she filled up the measure of my content by adding.

"Miss Diana Macon was buried in white satin shoes and silk stockings," remarked I in a subdued key. "Isn't it strange that the two things should be so much alike? Marrying and burying, I mean. No! I don't either!" seeing that I had made a false step, but not what a blunder it was—"I ought not to say *that*—but—"

"Don't try to take it back! Children and fools speak the truth. Many a girl stands up to be married when she would thank God for the privilege of lying down beside poor Diana in her shroud. I should not call her 'poor,' but 'rich and happy woman,' to be out of it all! You are right, Mousie! Marriage and death *are* awfully alike. God help women everywhere to-night! But He doesn't! I think sometimes that it is part of our curse—that He should always be on the side of the men, or seem to be. *They* can ask for whatever they want, and plead and plan and work until they get it, and everybody is ready to lend a helping hand, while we—! If a woman could keep her heart from breaking or save her soul by putting out her hand to touch a man who is passing by without seeing her, she cannot do it. She

must let him go, and hide her hurt as well as she can!"

"*I* wouldn't!" said I, in the confidence of a precocious twelve-year-old. "I would call him if I died for it."

"You 'd die for it if you did! Lose his respect and your own, and gain the contempt of everybody else! What stuff I am talking! I believe I am slightly out of my head to-night. You must get Aunt Maria to show you her dress. She looks like a tall, slender lily-of-the-valley in it—just as sweet and modest and pure."

"She wrote to Aunt Betsey that you were to be married in white satin."

"Yes! as thick as a board and as shiny as shroud-cambric! Ugh! I *hate* it!"

"Why do you wear it, then?"

"Because it is the prescribed rig for brides. If it wasn't for the talk it would make I would be married in black crape, and keep the satin abomination for my funeral."

"You don't look and talk a bit like yourself," decided I, shocked and judicial. "I have always heard that it alters people very much to be engaged. Now, all the change we 've noticed in Uncle Archie is that he is gentler and happier, nicer than ever before, and a great deal handsomer. Aunt Betsey says he has a kind of *glorified* look."

She shifted me to the other knee, getting me between her and the fire, that was now glaringly bright, leaned her forehead on my shoulder, her face in shadow, and was motionless so long that I took it into my head she was praying silently.

She did not stir when the door-bell rang and Uncle Archie's step sounded in the hall. Not until he had

crossed the room and paused before her did she raise her head. Then she held out her hand smilingly:

"Excuse me for not rising. Sweetbrier is a little tired after her journey, and I am resting her."

"Very much to her satisfaction, I have no doubt," passing his hand over my hair, as he drew a chair to her side.

I felt intuitively that he wished me anywhere else at that moment, and began to meditate an escape.

"It rains still—does it not?" Miss Virginia kept the conversation in safe channels.

"Yes—but it is growing cold and the wind is so high that we shall probably have clear weather by to-morrow."

"Yes?" abstractedly.

Uncle Archie held out his hand to me.

"Judith! I am afraid you are too heavy for Miss Virginia."

She grasped me when I tried to rise.

"She is as light as a feather. I like to have her here. It has been a weary while since I saw her. And we are great cronies—aren't we, dear? have ever and ever so much to say to one another."

Her hot lips touched my cheek. Uncle Archie put his hand on hers as it lay on the arm of the chair. I felt a sharp shiver run over her—then, that she held herself perfectly still.

"Please let me go!" I breathed in her ear.

For reply I had a tighter clasp, and a look into my eyes I could have resisted as easily as I could interpret it. This might be the shy sweetness I had read of in romances—maidenly coyness as diagnosed by the best authorities in Cupid's practice. If this were so I hoped Uncle Archie understood the symptoms better than I.

The fatigues of the day had not put me to sleep when

the two young ladies came up to their chamber for the night.

"I suppose it is prudent to reserve your strength," Aunt Maria was saying, "but I think he expected to have, at least, a half-hour's talk alone with you."

"Would you have me look like a hag on my wedding-day?" retorted the other with affected asperity. "You who pretend to admire my complexion ought to second my attempts to preserve it."

All the next day, in accordance with time-sanctioned usage, the bride was kept in strict seclusion, visible only to the bridesmaids. These, eight in number, and all pretty—for that night at least—gathered about her like a bouquet of snow-drops enclosing, as heart and queen, a moss-rose bud, when the bridegroom and his attendants appeared. By preconcerted arrangement I slipped down stairs while the train was forming, and stood by Major Dabney in a place reserved for my diminutive person by Wickham. The bishop, benignant in snowy lawn and silvery hair, was stationed between the back-parlor windows, a spacious area before him swept clear of the guests who crowded the rooms and hall. From this reserved space a path was with difficulty opened at a given signal for the progress of the eight couples from the front-parlor door. They paced it slowly, Aunt Maria and Stanhope Dabney, Miss Virginia's cousin, last and immediately preceding bride and groom. As each pair reached the Bishop it fell apart, the gentleman taking a stand at his right, the lady at his left, gradually shaping a ring which received the clasp and seal when the pair to be married faced him. The bride was supported on her left by a semicircle of gallant cavaliers, the groom by a crescent of fair women. Everything went off with perfect order and decorum. At the appointed second the bride's glove

was dexterously removed by the best man, Uncle Archie's by his sister, the ring was slipped to its place with the too-often meaningless formula—"With this ring I thee wed, with all my worldly goods I thee endow," etc.

Presbyterian Uncle Archie said it slowly and solemnly. Repetition had not dulled the significance of the pledge for him. His enunciation of the name of the Divine Triune was deep-toned and reverent, his head bowed prayerfully.

The bride's roses repaid her for the care given to their preservation. Her bloom was brilliant, her smile ready and sweet in receiving congratulations and good wishes. Her lip trembled when her father caught her to his breast with a half-sob, giving his left hand, at the same moment, to his son-in-law.

"God bless you both!" I was near enough to hear the old soldier say. "There isn't another man alive to whom I would so willingly give her. I told *her* so, months and months ago."

Mrs. Dabney's hysterical dampness restored her stepdaughter to her wonted tranquillity of demeanor. The habit of retrieving the good creature's mishaps of speech, of guarding others against the effects of her tactlessness, could not be cast aside even at this juncture. Without forgetting the ceremony due to herself as the cynosure of the occasion, she took up her customary duties as the hostess-daughter of the house and discharged them with the easy cordiality that became her so well.

I was watching her admiringly from a safe corner behind an oleander tree in pink affluence of blossom, when I overheard a fragment of a dialogue that was certainly not meant for the ears of any one allied to either of the two newly-united families.

"Ned isn't here, I see," said one man slyly to another. "He 's badly hurt and takes it hard!"

"Yes, but what a fool to advertise it by staying away to-night!" rejoined his friend, whose left lappel was decorated with a "groomsman's favor"—a ribbon rosette of blue and silver, with flowing ends. "Everybody is noticing and whispering about it. I have heard a dozen jokes on the subject."

"Was it ever an engagement?"

"Humph! Hardly, I reckon. I should say 'certainly not,' if I trusted to my knowledge of the parties and personal observation. He swears that she encouraged him, gets black in the face when he talks about it and so forth. But I doubt if she ever gave him more encouragement, as he calls it, than she did a dozen others. I don't blame her for discarding him. Between ourselves, she couldn't have done a more sensible thing. I thought, last winter and spring, that Bradley had the inside track and was doing capital running. In fact, I would have backed him against the field, but he may have been taking care of Read's interests. That's the way it looks now, at any rate."

"Would the old gentleman have given consent to that match?"

"Um-m-m! doubtful—very! There must have been a pretty thorough understanding all around of the real state of affairs."

"She played the game confoundedly well. These innocent-looking, frank-eyed girls who smile upon every fellow are the devil's own for cunning. I wouldn't trust one of them on oath."

The other burst out laughing.

"Halloa! are you galled, too? How many more victims, I wonder!"

When I repeated the substance of this conversation

to Aunt Maria, next day, she flushed up painfully—I fancied indignantly—and charged me to let it go no further.

"It was foolish and wicked for them to speak in that way! You must not allow such wild gossip to affect your manner or feelings toward your Aunt Virginia. She never flirted with either Mr. Allen or Mr. Bradley!"

"I know *that!*" I rejoined eagerly. "She could not have helped knowing that Uncle Archie was in love with her, and Mr. Bradley certainly saw it. It would have been dishonorable in him to court her, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, dear," lifting a calm face from the letter she was writing. "Put the whole matter out of your mind."

This injunction served, of course, only to fix indelibly in the retentive mind of childhood every incident of the winter that had passed.

Aunt Maria's letter was to my mother, whose younger children were "down" with whooping-cough. In her disappointment at her inability to attend the wedding, she had exacted a promise from her sister that she would forward a full description of the festivities on the morrow of the marriage-eve. The other day, in overhauling a trunk crammed with old letters, I happened upon the brittle, yellow pages bearing the particulars she knew would interest her housewifely correspondent. I transcribe an extract:

"We went in to supper at eleven o'clock, the ceremony having taken place at eight. The table was extremely handsome. The centre-piece was a cake, richly iced, eighteen inches across and ten inches in height, and surrounded by a treble-curled fringe of silver paper. In the hollow in the middle of this cake, left by the funnel of the mould, was planted a pretty,

slender holly tree, four feet high, hung with fancy baskets, and wreaths and streamers of silver filigree, and closely sprinkled with red berries. At one end of the table was a tall pyramid of jelly and ice-cream; at the other, one of candied oranges. Both were built about two small silver rods, and to the tops of these were fastened silver-paper festoons, cut exquisitely into patterns as fine as lace, connecting the pyramids with the tree. Between the centre-piece and the pyramids were immense cakes iced in pink and white, cheese-cakes, piles of snow-balls, fruits, nuts, candies, etc. Another long table was loaded with meats of all kinds, oysters, tea and coffee. They were lighted, as were all the rooms, by wax candles in tall silver candlesticks hung with tissue-paper cut in every imaginable device, then dipped in spermaceti to make it transparent. On the sideboard were superb cut-glass decanters filled with red and white wine, and a punch-bowl so enormous that Judith thinks it must be the fellow to that in which the three wise men of Gotham went to sea. There were also liqueurs of various kinds and cherry-bounce, and in the hall another big bowl of egg-nogg, refilled three times before supper. The bride's health was drunk in Madeira laid down in Captain Macon's cellar the day Virginia was born.

"The second-day dinner is to be eaten here to-day. Virginia is to wear pale-blue satin, trimmed with old lace that belonged to her own mother. I need not tell you how very lovely she looks in it, nor how well she and Archie behave. One might suppose they had been married ten years. They are evidently perfectly satisfied with one another. About twenty, including, of course, the bridesmaids and groomsmen, are invited to the dinner. To-morrow we leave for Summerfield and comparative quiet."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. ARCHIBALD READ'S wedding-present from her father was characteristic of him and of the times in which he lived. She went to her new home in a handsome carriage built expressly for her, "R" in raised solid silver letters on the doors and the harness of a pair of blooded roadsters selected and bought by the Major, who was a famous judge of horse-flesh. On the box was a young colored man, born in "the family," whose father and grandfather had been reared on the Dabney estate. Beside the coachman—wrapped up to the ears in shawls and blankets, a foot-stove under her feet—was Dosia, the bride's own maid. Both of the servants were to form a part of the Summerfield establishment henceforward, and lent "tone" of no weak character to the equipage.

The bridal pair traveled together, Aunt Maria, myself and Emmeline, our maid, in the Summerfield carriage. The three outriders were Uncle Sterling and the two other groomsmen, who had accompanied us on our townward journey, three days earlier. A crew of children, white and black, and of idling servants collected in the street to watch the departure of the cortége. Aunt Virginia's "Mammy" threw an old shoe after the grand new chariot; Major Dabney and the boys stood outside of the gate, blowing their noses very hard, their eyes watering in the piercing wind. Mrs. Dabney we had left in high and mighty hysterics on the parlor-sofa.

"I never imagined," said I, pertly, subsiding into my corner with a ponderous respiration, "that getting mar-

ried was such a dreadful business. Even Uncle Archie does not look half as happy as he ought to do. As for Miss—*Aunt*—Virginia, she can't help showing that she is miserable, and the rest behave as if Uncle Archie were an ogre carrying her off to a cave to eat her up at his leisure. Upon my word"—waxing fretful, for nerves and temper were on edge—"I don't see why she said 'Yes' to him if she was going to feel so badly about leaving home. He didn't oblige her to do it, I suppose. It isn't much of a compliment to him or to us, the way they carry on!"

"Hush, my love! You may understand some things better when you are older and have seen more of the world," was all the reply I had.

It was gently uttered, but Aunt Maria's mild dignity always quelled my saucy fits more effectually than did Aunt Betsey's lectures or my mother's occasional sarcasm.

My mentor was hardly in her usual spirits that day, which was the coldest of the season. I fancied that the necessity of having the glasses of both doors closed to exclude the biting air was not disagreeable to her; that she would rather think than chat with our escorts. They fared hardly enough, although their surtouts were heavy, their necks and ears shielded by turned-up collars and woolen scarfs, their legs incased in close "wrappers." Every few miles one or another was obliged to dismount and walk briskly along the frozen turnpike to restore circulation to his limbs. Blankets and foot-stoves kept us from absolute discomfort, our vehicles being well-built and the winter wadding, or "squabs"—to wit, cushioned inner curtains—excluding the searching blasts. Five miles out of town we halted suddenly and saw that the carriage in front was stationary. Uncle Archie opened our leeward door.

"How are you getting on in here? We stopped to let Dosia get down from the box. Virginia was uneasy about her. She is not strong at any time, and this is not fit weather for a woman to be out, so we have taken her inside."

"Put her in *here*," said Aunt Maria, promptly. "There is plenty of room, you see. It would be by far the better arrangement for all."

"What a jewel of a sister!" a loving, grateful smile illumining his face. "I never thought of that. If you really wouldn't mind—"

"I should like it. Don't stand there freezing your feet, but run along and send her and her foot-stove and bandbox to us!"

In another minute he was back himself, gravely regretful. "Virginia is afraid Dosia would crowd you too much, there being three of you, already, and only two of us. She says if anybody is inconvenienced by her maid she ought to be that one. You know how unselfish she is. The girl is stowed away and tucked in with the whole front seat to herself. I am just as much obliged to you, Maria, but perhaps it is best to let matters remain as they are. Take care of yourselves, and keep as comfortable as you can. It is bitter weather!"

He spoke fast, for it was freezing cold, shut us up again, and was off.

"Miss Virginny 'll sp'ile Doshy fo' sho', ef she humors her in that 'ar way," commented country-bred Emmeline in strong reprobation. "I don' know what *she's* a-thinkin' 'bout to be willin' to stay thar'. She mought have sense 'nough o' her own fur to see that 'taint noways consequential to be a-pushin' herself into a cuarridge 'longside o' new-married folks. I 'd 'a' friz stiffer 'n a ice-*sick*le 'fore I 'd 'a' sot foot inside!"

"Miss Virginia is always thoughtful of others' comfort, and is the best judge of her own affairs," replied Aunt Maria as quietly as she had reproved me; then leaned back and shut her eyes, as if drowsy.

We dined at the "House of Entertainment," and having left word to that effect on our way to Richmond, we found gloriously hot fires and a bountiful dinner ready for us, with host and hostess in holiday attire to receive the wedding-party. The hour spent within the hospitable hostelry was a most welcome break in the severe journey. The one mitigation of its rigor was the hardness of the roads, which enabled us to traverse the distance in less time than if the depth of winter mud had prevailed. But we were tossed and battered over frozen lumps and ridges of clay as over so many stones.

We had started early and traveled well, still the days were at their shortest, and we saw the sun sink into an uninviting bed of clouds behind the rambling roofs of Summerfield as we turned into the half-mile outer gate of the plantation. Aunt Maria's eyes were dark and heavy, her cheeks wan now that the need of exertion and outward cheerfulness was removed. She was very silent all day, and I had slept myself into better humor. She smoothed my tumbled hair, now, tied on my hood and straightened the cape of my cloak, smiled and spoke pleasantly.

"How good it will seem to get home again and in such happy circumstances! And if we *are* tired and cold we won't be cross and ungrateful, Judith, dear—will we?"

Not one jot or tittle did Aunt Betsey abate of the ceremonies with which the future mistress of the homestead should be brought to her abiding-place. A double line of servants fell into position along the

walk from the house to the gate, grinning and courtesying, their teeth chattering and eyeballs rolling with excitement and cold. Between these walked the bride on her husband's arm, Uncle Sterling at her other hand, the two groomsmen escorting Aunt Maria and my puny, consequential self. The hall-door flew wide open as we reached the steps, and Aunt Betsey, arrayed in black satin and sheer lawn stomacher, issued forth.

"Lift her over the threshold, Archie!" cried she, when she had embraced the bride. "My dear boy! don't you know it is bad luck to let her touch her foot to the sill?"

He obeyed with such good-will that he did not set down his lovely burden until he put it into his mother's arms. They had not suffered Grandma to venture into the fireless hall. She awaited us within the drawing-room, a striking picture in her gentle stateliness; her fine face alight with youthful fire, her beautiful old hands held out eagerly.

"My *dear* children!"

"Oh, mother!" It was a piteous cry with which the girl, who could not recollect her own mother, cast herself on the tender bosom and clung there, weeping aloud and wildly, "Mother! Mother! *Mother!*"

Grandma motioned Uncle Archie away as the fit of emotion grew violent, and beckoned Mammy to her aid. Between them they got Aunt Virginia to the chamber in the wing which had been made brave and bright for her occupancy, and nursed her into warmth of body and outward composure.

Uncle Archie was left to get rid of his chilliness over the fire in the drawing-room, and to parry as best he could the impertinent felicitations of his brothers who, at first, alarmed by the reception-scene, speedily found

in it infinite amusement when coupled with the circumstance of the long drive the newly-wedded pair had taken, virtually *en tête-à-tête*, Dosia counting for nothing in the conversation. I could have fought them both as they piled compassion for her upon remonstrance with him for having talked her to death, and seriously augured terrible things for the future of the persecuted woman. There was neither wit nor sense in their rattle.

"Do stop them, Aunt Maria!" entreated I, angry, unshed tears scalding my eyelids. "They tease him so! And he looks so sick and tired!"

"He can afford to let them laugh!" She slipped her hand under her brother's arm and leaned her cheek on his sleeve, as he stood at the corner of the hearth, his elbow on the mantel, paler than I had ever seen him in health, and hardly seeming to hear the nonsense hummed about his ears.

"Sterling is only mad with jealousy, and Wythe is his echo," pursued the sister, merrily. "Archie understands this too well to listen to what they say. Virginia is chilled through and completely tired out, brother"—in a different tone. "She has kept up nobly all through the weeks of wedding-haste. If you could see the work she has done you would wonder that she is alive—not that she broke down when she felt that she was at last at *home* and where she could afford to rest!"

His arm encircled her with an abrupt movement; his eyes overflowed with the fond smile that unbent his lips.

"There was never such another woman for saying the right thing at the right time! Sterling!" resuming the elder-brotherly tone that always enforced respect—"will you go up stairs and see that Clem and Archer have all they want? Tell Jack to keep up a good fire

in their room until bed-time. Supper will be ready in an hour—did you say, Aunt Betsey? Then I shall have time to go out to the stables and give an eye to things generally."

Aunt Maria's look expostulated, but her tongue did not. The young planter paid his nightly visit of inspection to the farm-yard, and received a condensed report from his head man of what had been done in his absence; then, coming in, made the needful changes in his dress in his mother's room not to disturb his wife, who was lying down in her apartment while Dosia unpacked one trunk. When supper was ready Aunt Betsey sent me for him.

"Tell him he must bring your Aunt Virginia into the dining-room," said the punctilio-loving relative.

Her relish of the situation and of her rôle was something to see and to remember.

Grandma was in her easy-chair. Uncle Archie had thrown himself on the rug at her feet, and sat, holding her hand while they talked.

"Very well! You will wait for Grandma," he said, when my message was delivered.

He tarried an instant to fold her shawl about her, and to lay more wood on her fire. His mother's comfort must never be a secondary consideration.

She stood behind her chair at table, the rest of us in due order behind ours, when the butler, privately instructed by Aunt Betsey, flung open the door to reveal the wedded twain approaching, arm-in-arm. The bride had rallied from faintness and tearfulness; her complexion was brilliant, her blue eyes starry, her "second-day's dress" enhanced the effect of her fairness and the beauty of her red-gold curls. The man beside her looked like a prince in the glory of his content. He took the master's post at the foot of the table, placing

her beside him, and, all still standing, he asked a blessing on "the food provided for our use." Everything was so natural, yet so utterly unlike the olden days when almost the same party sat at meals in the same room for weeks together, that I was dazed as to my whereabouts and identity.

The "infair" supper was in constituents and quantity expressive of Aunt Betsey's convictions as to the importance of the time and circumstances. There were, at least, ten dishes of meat, as many of cake, preserves, jellies, etc.; the same number of varieties of hot bread. The groomsmen, hungry after the long, cold ride, did ample justice to the feast, and were kept in countenance by my younger uncles. Aunt Maria ate sparingly; Aunt Virginia strove to cover her lack of appetite by a social flow of chat with those near her, and perhaps did not see the solicitous glances Uncle Archie stole at her plate. He would never annoy her by overt assiduity of attention, but her slightest motion did not escape him.

In obedience to respectable custom, the conversation, under Aunt Betsey's direction, contained numerous references to the wooing and betrothal.

"A fashion which is less considered each year," remarked Mrs. Waddell, mournfully, in a gap that gave her opportunity to utter the lament for the benefit of recusants. "In my day no other topic was thought to be quite the proper thing at wedding entertainments."

"What was done when there was neither courtship nor engagement in the usual sense of the terms?" put in Uncle Archie, boldly. "And we had none—*to speak of!*"

The general laugh diverted notice from the grateful look the wife stole at him from under her lashes. I apprehended, if she did not, that he would have interposed his hand between her and living fire as readily as

he raised a shield to turn aside gossip that might confuse her.

The weather had not moderated by half a degree by the following morning, but a gray pall was stretched from horizon to horizon over the steel-blue sky of yesterday. It was too cold to snow—much too cold to rain—yet the clouds drooped gloomily lower as the day wore into afternoon. Our cousins, the Reads from Burleigh, and the Fonthill Archers, also connected with us by consanguineous ties, were invited to dinner. We could not have a "dining-day" so soon after Diana Macon's death, yet the company of relatives should have been merrier than they succeeded in becoming. The elder ladies clustered in the corners nearest the fire, and talked soberly in mellow Southern accents; their husbands discussed politics with one another and the most thoughtful of the younger men, while even Clem Read faltered perceptibly in the unpromising undertaking of flirtation with the unwedded women of the party who were all his first cousins. Aunt Virginia wore a pea-green silk gown with delicate lace trimmings, one of the prettiest in her trousseau. She did her best, in attire and demeanor, to enliven the somewhat too-domestic scene, and must have been secretly disheartened at the result.

If she did not draw comparisons between it and the hilarious junketing of one year agone, I did, and in dissatisfaction too deep for endurance or expression. It was not only the absence of the brilliant Macon element, or the obtrusive memory of their sorrows, nor yet the paucity of other beaux and belles that wrought flatness of general effect and induced individual depression. I felt, vaguely, that the life had gone out of everything; that the pretense of gayety was a deplorable and obvious fiction, and that the every-day level of Summerfield

existence would be a relief after the prescribed festivities were finally and thoroughly disposed of.

When dinner was over, and young, old and middle-aged women surrounded the yule fire in the parlor, while their masculine associates smoked in the dining-room, I abandoned the cast of fine lady, to which I had taken a fancy during my town experiences. It might do well enough there; in the country it was unremunerative—at my age. I ran up stairs for my cloak and warm red hood, convened a posse of dark-skinned attendants, and rushed off on a frolic over the frost-bound hills with the zest of a boy let loose from school. As I ran, I shouted in the delight of the relief, and my band answered with Christmas yells. Aunt Virginia, in the sedulous talk-making the poor girl had maintained all day, had said in my hearing how fond she was of persimmons, and that they were rarely brought to the Richmond market. There was a persimmon-grove not far from the plantation gate, and this was the ostensible object of the expedition. I wondered, while the wild scamper warmed my blood and dispelled the blue-devils I could not fight in-doors, if the pretty, patient chief guest, still trying to make talk in the house I left further behind at every bound, would not be glad to doff her pea-green silk, and clad in sensible merino, forget dinner-party and bridehood in my company.

The sharp frosts had strewed the ground with fruit. There was a saying with us that persimmons were not really ripe until Christmas. Those we picked up were slightly shrivelled like the skin of healthy old age; in color, dark-purple—almost black, and touched with a silvery film as a plum is with misty blue. Inside, the glossy brown seeds were incased in juices, sugared to granulation, a dry, dulcet, mealy pulp, far superior in flavor to the more highly-esteemed date. I sent the

boys up the trees when we had cleared the ground under them, and made them shake down fresh supplies. At last I climbed a small tree myself, totally oblivious of so much as a shred of my late "best behavior," and swung gayly in the supple branches, found in the frozen fruit a more sumptuous dessert than all Aunt Betsey's dainties. I had just dropped to the earth by letting myself down at full arm's length from a lower bough when one of my convoy gave a screech.

"Lor', Miss Judith! Looky *dar!* Dat horse done fall down!"

A covered "carryall," a four-wheeled cart with a long, painted wooden body and a tent-cloth top, was at the plantation gate. The colored driver had alighted to unlatch and open it, but had brought his wretched-looking horse too near before checking him. The gate was heavy and better hung than those the man was used to handling. It slipped from his hold at the first jerk and swung open with such force as to knock the jaded beast off his feet. He went down prone, like a dead thing, snapping the shaft in the fall and made no effort to rise.

We rushed pell-mell to the scene of action, the latter element being embodied in the man's kicks and tugs at the prostrate animal, and the agile leap from the rear of the vehicle of a woman, done up in a red blanket-shawl. She interrupted her scolding of the driver by a shriek at sight of me, darted forward and caught me in her arms, persimmons, basket and all.

"Miss Judith! Miss Judith! Mussiful Marster in heaven! ef here ain't the blessid chile herself!"

I knew her voice before I did her face, which was thin and haggard, woefully changed from the coquettish prettiness of the "red-winged blackbird," Harry Macon's maid.

"Apphia!" I gasped. "Where is—"

"Hishe! honey, hishe!" pointing to the carryall. "I done been brung her back—what 's left of her!"

What was left of her! More apt description could not have been given of her who slowly descended from the carryall with the help of Apphia on one side, the colored man on the other. The eyes looked out from hollows where lurked ashy shadows, the forehead was bloodless, the nostrils pinched, the lips shrunken and fever-dried. On each cheek was a botch of hectic scarlet, kindling up fierily when Apphia entreated her not to alight.

"He cannot go further!" she whispered, nodding toward the horse. "I will walk!"

But she staggered at the first step and leaned against the wheel. Apphia pulled a blanket from the cart, wrapped her in it from head to foot, and made her sit down on a fallen tree-trunk in the lee of a bushy cedar.

"Come here, Miss Judith, and stay 'long her—won't you—please? I 've got to help him hyste that horse up, I s'pose. 'Fore *I'd* be sech an empty-headed, awk'ard buzzard as not to know how to open a gate! Here! some of *you*, thar'! pick up your feet an' run to the house fas' as you can clip it, an' tell Mars' Archie Read how Miss Harry Macon is here—mighty sick and mos' frozen to death, an' won't he sen' somethin', if 'tain't nothin' but a tumbler-cuart, for to fetch her in. Be off!"

Without a look after the bevy that flew like startled snow-birds at her imperious mandate, she bent the energies of arm and tongue to the effort to help the horse up and to the salutary beratement of his owner.

"I wouldn't lift a finger to help either you or your crow-bait," she took care to inform the fellow, "cf 'twasn't that your rubbish has got to be cleared 'way

from the gate to let Mr. Archibald Read's carriage pass through!"

Horror-stricken into dumbness, I stood behind Miss Harry (I never think of her by any other name), put my arms around her and tried to uphold her against my chest. She shivered with cold or agitation, and coughed several times so violently that she leaned back, quite spent in my embrace at the close of each paroxysm. Her eyes were shut and I thought she was dying. Apphia's emissaries sped fast, and there was assuredly no lagging in the response to the summons they bore. But months have been briefer to me than the interval during which my benumbed feet seemed freezing to the iron earth, and colder dreads settled horribly on my soul. Two or three of the least of the colored children huddled together at a terrified distance and watched us; Apphia and the stupefied driver got the horse up, and he tied the pieces of the broken thill together with a rope he drew from the straw in the bottom of the cart, she holding the fragments in place, her sharp tongue never still. The drooping clouds borrowed increasing darkness from approaching night; the wind murmured ceaselessly in the pine tops, and presently fine, close rain began to sift down upon us, glazing the carryall-top and the log on which Miss Harry sat. Apphia begged her to get back into the cart, but she opened her eyes in a vacant stare, a bemused, uncomprehending look, and shook her head. The woman poured something from a bottle into a cup, and held it resolutely to the parched lips until it was swallowed. My tears found vent and trickled silently down my face as I saw Apphia wipe hers away with a corner of her shawl.

The drizzle was a dense veil between us and the homestead, and the beat of many swift feet on the

frozen road was the first token we had that help was at hand. Uncle Archie was foremost in the race. Too anxious to wait while the carriage was made ready, he had ordered that it should follow him with speed, and run all the way from the house. With the perverse disposition to mark trifles that besets us in supreme crises, I noted that he had come out in his low shoes and without hat or surtout. He was white and out of breath, and the forked vein in his forehead was swollen and blue. Halting momentarily a few feet from us, he steadied himself for the meeting, walked quietly up to my charge, dropped on one knee, took her in his arms, and kissed her as he would his sister.

"Lean all your weight on me, Harry! The carriage will be here directly."

Not a syllable more was spoken, until he lifted her like a child in his arms and laid her among the pillows Aunt Betsey had put into the carriage.

"Get in, Judith," he said to me, and himself stepped in after us, supporting the sinking form on his broad breast until we were at home.

This was his fulfillment of the compact on which they had shaken hands eleven months before this Christmas night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MOUNTED messenger had spurred off in one direction through the rainy darkness for the doctor. Clem Read had gone in person to Hunter's Rest to convey the intelligence of the prodigal's return. The coaches from Burleigh and Fonthill had rolled away, the lamps shedding sparkles of tremulous light upon the sleety twigs of wayside brushwood and striking broadly on bank and tree-bole, thinly coated with ice. Below-stairs and in the outlying servants' houses the subdued stir of intense emotion was like the muffled breathing of a single strong, living thing. Those who walked trod on tiptoe; those who talked spoke in hurried whispers. Grandma and her sons sat together over the dining-room fire, scarcely exchanging a sentence from one minute to another. Aunt Betsey slipped soundlessly from chamber to chamber, making ready for those who would be with us before midnight—the physician, the brothers, and possibly the father of her whose earthly life was, for aught we could see, narrowed down to the measure of hours.

They had put her to bed in Aunt Maria's room. Unobserved in the preoccupation of the attendants, I crept, cold and forlorn and all dressed as I was, into my own little bed in the remote corner of the apartment, and had the comfort of feeling myself out of the way, yet where I would not lose sight of the sufferer. My fondness for her was augmented into a passion of devotion by the romantic episodes of our intercourse during the spring, and by commiseration for her present

evil plight. I was in childlike earnest when I said to myself that I would willingly lay down my life if by so doing I could put her back into her father's arms, the incarnation of youth, beauty and joy she had been a year ago. As it was, I could do nothing but pray for her, and my faith was weak as to the efficacy of ungrammatical petitions not ordered according to ecclesiastical rules. Such poor ejaculations as formed themselves in my thoughts arose no higher than my head, like bits of thistle-down in damp air. I hoped the Lord understood how much I wanted my dear Miss Harry to get well, and how unhappy I was when I could not make a prayer good enough in which to ask Him to bless and cure and make up to her for all she had undergone; but I had grave and harrowing doubts whether they ever got to His ears or not. It was not likely that a little ignoramus, half-frightened out of her wits by the imminence of the peril, could frame "an acceptable petition." Uncle Archie's morning family devotions included a clause that entreated blessings on "all who are near and dear unto us." In my misery I fumbled the phrase over and over in my mind as measurably available in the circumstances, whispering mechanically, while my senses were intent upon the scenes before me:

"O Lord! bless those who are near and dear to us, and suffer no accident to befall them this day!"

Silence succeeded the bustle of removal and disrobing. Mammy had gone to the kitchen to make broth and tisanes. Aunt Maria and Aunt Virginia watched at the bedside. The rays of a shaded lamp on the mantel showed dimly the gala dresses the sisters-in-law had not bethought themselves to lay aside. Harry rested high among the pillows, her respiration easier as she dozed off into a natural slumber, her face ghastly

but for the red spots that seemed to glow through the half-lights of the chamber. She had lain thus for perhaps an hour, her watchers as motionless as herself, when suddenly she opened her great eyes wide and directly upon Aunt Virginia.

"I didn't want you to marry him!" she said, distinctly, although her voice was thin and shrill with weakness. "I told you Archie Read was the stronger of the two—the noblest fellow in the world—and had loved you long and well. But you needn't have *jilted* the other. It almost broke his heart."

It was Aunt Maria's hand that stroked the fevered cheek caressingly, her soft accents that strove to dispel the delirium. "Harry! dear child! you are dreaming. You are at home—at Summerfield—Grandma Read's—don't you know? Don't try to talk, until you are stronger!"

"I must find out the truth. My word is pledged! He was so good to me in Philadelphia that I want to show my gratitude in some way—before I die. I used to think—I believed—that he was in love—with you, Maria—"

"Harry! wake up, dear! I cannot let you run on so! You distress yourself. Never mind about it now. There will be time enough to tell us by-and-by!"

I may have been mistaken, but I fancied I saw an involuntary smile sweep over the pitying face of the nurse as she cooed dissuasives in the ears of the excited invalid. She brought water and bathed Harry's head and wrists, apparently totally unsuspicious that there was weight or coherence in the broken sentences. The sick woman put her by with an impatient gesture—the regal air that belonged to her former self.

"He told me all about it one night. I never really knew Mr. Bradley until then. He said his love for you

was a passing fancy—'born of propinquity,' he said. You know how he puts things. That his heart had been Virginia Dabney's from the first day he saw her. He kept it a secret while he lived here. He thought Archie loved her, and he was his friend. After he went to Richmond she told him that Archie could never be more to her than a dear brother. There was nothing dishonorable, then— Sit still! I *must* speak!"

For Aunt Maria on one side, Aunt Virginia on the other, had arisen by a common impulse, staring straight into one another's eyes across the death-bed. Such a look! blank with amaze, woeful to agony, despairing as the gaze of the lost! For one second each saw this in her sister's face; then, the three-days wife fell on her knees with a stifled cry and buried her head in the coverlet as if to escape from mortal sight.

Aunt Maria stooped to Harry's ear.

"Do you know what you are saying, Harry Macon? Look at me! I am Maria Read. You are feverish and wandering—are you not, dear?"

A dreary smile wrung the altered features.

"I know you better than I do myself. *You* call me 'Harry Macon.' I thought once that I was Mrs. Waring. I have had three or four *aliases* since then. But I haven't strength or time to talk of my affairs. I promised Mr. Bradley solemnly that you— Where is Virginia Dabney?" lifting her head to look for her. "I am glad to see that you are sorry you treated him so cruelly. Why did you send his letters back as fast as they came, without a word of explanation? It was shameful unkindness. It was unladylike, too, and *that* surprised me. It will be visited upon you before you die. All my folly and hardness of heart has come home to me sevenfold. 'God is not mocked.

Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' That is the fire that is consuming me. Oh! I am so thirsty!"

Aunt Maria raised her to drink the lemonade she held to her mouth, but without speaking. Aunt Virginia arose slowly, her rosy face blanched, her eyes dilated; wrung her hands hard, then lifted them clenched and high toward Heaven.

"As the Lord lives, I did no such thing! I never had a letter from him after he left Richmond last July! I wrote to him four times begging him to explain his silence. Oh, who has done this wicked thing? My darling! my poor, deceived, true love! What shall I do? what shall I do?"

Harry sat upright, trembling and eager, a dreadful splendor in her eyes.

"Write to him this very night! I have his address. How happy he will be! Through *me*, too! He was so kind—so kind!"—yielding to the gentle violence with which Aunt Maria drew her back to the pillow. "Thank God I can do some good! Now—I—can—sleep!"

The young wife swept hurriedly by me to the door; the swish of her silken skirts died away on the stairs. Aunt Maria sought a cordial and pressed it upon the exhausted patient, covered her up and waited, her fingers on the wasted wrist, to see her lapse into slumber. Then her head fell on her breast, and a single groan tore its way through heart and lips:

"Oh, my God!"

Distraught and hopeless though she was, the cry was a prayer.

Profound stillness filled the room. The sick woman slept; the watcher made neither moan nor motion. The rising wind cried fretfully outside, and the sleet hissed against the panes. The dull flame of the single

lamp swayed slightly in the air that found its way between the sashes, brought out flickering gleams of ruddy sheen from the folds of Aunt Maria's garnet silk gown. She had sunk to the floor, her elbows on the bed, her face hidden by her hands. The graceful head had the droop of a bruised flower. Of all the sad scenes and crises that have come into my life, none has been more utterly tristful, more lightless than this.

In trying to grasp the complication of mystery and calamity, my brain succumbed wearily into a heavy sleep that lasted until daylight.

I awoke with a startled sense that I was in a crowd of people, all staring at me. My corner was clear, but about the bed at the far side of the chamber were collected those whose presence had wrought the oppression of my dream. Captain Macon was close beside his daughter on the left, facing me, holding one of her hands. Sidney's cheek was laid on the other as he knelt at her right. Roderick leaned against the footboard, shaking with sobs, his handkerchief to his eyes. Uncle Archie stood behind Captain Macon's chair, gazing in mournful steadfastness at his old playfellow and pet. His arm was about his wife's waist, and she clung to him, her face hidden on his breast. Aunt Betsey held a glass of cordial, hoping against certainty that the dying woman might revive sufficiently to swallow a few drops. Grandma was at the bed-head, and in her clear, wistful eyes was prophecy that outran faith, the beckoning of some safe spirit on the Other Side rather than the farewell benediction of one who expected soon to follow the passing soul. Mammy was by her, her arms crossed meekly on her bosom, her head bowed—waiting. Aunt Maria's tender arms had raised the sufferer at her own request. She sat on the bed, supported by the head-board; Harry rested against

her, her head on her shoulder, her cheek against the pure, sad face bent toward her.

She was going—fast but painlessly, each breath more faint than the last. Her eyes were fixed in an upward look, but she smiled as her father leaned over to kiss her—the loving, grateful gleam that quivers about the mouth of a drowsy child under her mother's "good-night" caress. In a minute more Uncle Archie set his wife aside gently, stepped forward, took the still shape from his sister's embrace, laid it down, and closed the eyes with a solemn, brotherly pressure.

From Apphia we gathered the story of Harry's wanderings since she fled at midnight from her father's door. Her entreaties that her husband would fulfill his promise of taking her to England were parried for awhile by his protestations that he had not the ready money in hand for the voyage. After the arrival of the cases sent from Hunter's Rest, she, with Apphia's help, sold all her jewels and laces and procured the sum needed to defray the expenses of the three across the ocean and to Fairwold Hall. Apphia had only conjectures to offer as to the particulars of the scene attendant on her proffer of the money to the exile. But Harry never spoke afterward of going to England and fell—purposely, or because those about her used the name—into the habit of speaking of her husband as "Mr. Trevelyan." From this interview Apphia also dated his changed demeanor toward his wife. Up to that time he had played the lover-husband and the polished gentleman. Thenceforward, he was sulky, sarcastic, occasionally violent, upbraiding her continually for her obstinate refusal to apply to her father for pecuniary aid, threatening to abandon her to disgrace and poverty, allowing her to go penniless for weeks, and leaving her with her faithful servant in miserable lodg-

ings in country or village while he was "starring" with circus troupes in the principal cities of the North and East. Finally, he gave her the choice between writing to her father, divulging the true state of affairs and asking him to maintain her and the man she had married —and taking care of herself for the future without his assistance.

The betrayed wife was proud enough and strong enough to accept the alternative, but in the prostration of a broken heart, she revealed to Apphia that neither John Waring nor Frederic Trevelyan was the man's real name. He was the natural son of a dissolute English baronet who had educated him showily, and attached him to his person in a mongrel capacity—part companion, part secretary, part jester. His mother was an Italian ballet-dancer, of whom the boy had no recollection. He traveled and rioted with his father after leaving school, the baronet glorying in the lad's beauty and sprightliness, most of all in his athletic feats, and encouraging his intimacies with *habitués* of cock-pits, circuses and races, not to mention worse places. The twain lived high and fast until the elder fell dead of apoplexy at the conclusion of a nocturnal carousal, and his property descended to his legal heirs. At twenty-one the pseudo John Waring belonged to a theatrical company, something after the order of the modern variety show, where his skill in gymnastic exercises was even more popular than his vocalization. Both, with his magnificent *physique*, were inherited from his mother. At twenty-seven he had journeyed far and sustained many characters, more or less brilliantly. His masterpiece of fraud was the well-sustained guise in which he secured admission to Major Dabney's house and won Harry Macon's heart.

It was a pitifully common, vulgar tale up to that

epoch; a catalogue of venal cheats and jugglery, shrewdly planned and audaciously executed. The tragic element was added on the night of his elopement with the petted daughter of a noble family. He deserted her in Philadelphia the latter part of August, and she had never heard from him since then. She lived in one small garret-room with her devoted retainer, their united efforts barely sufficing to earn the necessaries of life. The mistress took in fine sewing from customers for whom Apphia did clear-starching and ironing. One November evening as the latter was hurrying homeward after a day's work, she met under a lamp on Chestnut Street a man who accosted her by name. It was Mr. Bradley. She took him with her up to the mean attic to which her mistress had been confined for a month by a severe cold. The *ci-devant* tutor recognized at a glance that the malady was more deeply-seated than Apphia feared or Harry dared hope. He returned next day with a physician, who confidentially confirmed his fears. Mr. Bradley found an opportunity to tell Apphia that her mistress' one chance of life lay in her return to Virginia. The doctor undertook to build up her strength so far as to enable her to take the journey. Change of air and good nursing must accomplish the rest.

From the hour Harry heard of the project she rallied marvelously. She bound Mr. Bradley over by a solemn pledge not to write to her friends at home that she was found. She would go back to them in person, praying for pardon and an asylum. But he called often, paid secretly through Apphia for better food and a constant fire, and insisted upon lending "Mrs. Macon" money for traveling expenses. By the second week of December the physician advised that they should set out for Virginia. They had come by easy stages "across the

country," Apphia said, part of the way by public conveyance. The carryall that brought them to our gate was hired in Lynchburg from the free negro who drove it, and was the best their failing funds could procure.

"She jes' didn't *dar'* to go to Hunter's Res'!" said Apphia to me, the afternoon of the day on which Harry died. "She was fa'r afeerd o' her father and Mars' Sidney."

She and I were in Mammy's house, and nobody else was near. The big back-log of the fire was a mass of scarlet charcoal, and night was settling down apace at the other side of the room. In her sincere distress the maid was frank in her confidences, and her knowledge of how well I had loved her whom we both mourned opened her heart fully to my appeals and inquiries.

"She was sure *we* would not turn her away," I swallowed my sobs to say.

"That 's what she said many a time, honey! 'Mr. Archie Read is the truest, best man the good Lord ever made,' says she. 'He promis' me once that he 'd never cast me off, no matter what I do. He 's like his Marster in that. When my father an' my mother 'd forsake me, he 'd take me up. An' I don' think Aunt Betsey 'd 'fuse to take me in an' let me set at the secon' table anyhow,' says she, sort o' laughin' to herself. Once she call' to me in the middle of the night when we was a-stoppin' at a mizzable pore-white-folksey tavern, an' ef I was a-dying' this minnit I 'd declar' to goodness the bed the pore lady was a-layin' on was stuffed with corn-husks. 'Apphia,' says she, 'I should like to get thar' in time to die in Maria's bed. I never slep' so sweet in anybody else 's bed as I used to in Maria's,' says she, 'nor had sech lovely dreams on any other piller as on hern. I think that was 'cause she is so heavenly pure herself. The angels has 'special

charge over Maria Read. I 'd like to die under the shelter o' their wings.'

"Another time she tole me she done pick' out the tex' o' her funeral sermon, an' I mus' be sure not to forgit it. It was, 'Reproach hath broken my heart.' 'Twas true as Gospel too—them words! *He* made like he 'd knock me down one day when I said to him when she war'n't in the room that my young mistis war'n't use' to sech rough talk as he giv' her all the time. An' when he stomped his foot an' grit his teeth at me for speakin' so plain, I riz right up an' sot my arms in timber" (akimbo), "an' *dar'd* him to tech me.

"'This yer 's a free state!' says I. 'Ef you lay the weight o' yer p'isonous han' on me, I 'll put the law on you! I ain't your wife, nor your dog, nor your nigger!' says I. 'I been live' all my life with quality gen-'lemen an' ladies whar knowed how to treat respectable servants!' says I.

"Ah! he was the bigges' vilyan the Lord ever 'lowed to cuss His footstool!"

"How does Mr. Bradley look?" I asked.

"Han'somer 'n ever, an' peart as could be. He was a puffic' angel o' ministerin' mercy to my pore young lady. I been hear' her prayin' for him o' nights when she couldn't res' an' thought I was fas' asleep, an' thankin' her Heavenly Father for sendin' him to her when she was ready to perish."

She took a handful of corn-cobs from a basket on the hearth, threw them on the coals and pensively watched them blaze.

"I suttinly hope marster 'll pay him back all the money he done spen' for we-all. But for him, my blessid young mistis would 'a' died in that despiseable furren country. How her eyes 'd shine up the minnit she heerd him a-comin' up the sta'r-steps! They had talks

together by the hour 'bout home-folks an' ole times."

"Had he—had you heard of Miss Diana's death before you got here?"

"Not a word, honey-chile! I 'm fa'r thankful Miss Harry went to Heaven 'thout knowin' that her sister had flewed that 'ar' way before her. 'T mus' 'a' been a sweet surprise to them meetin' *thar*, an' 'long with their mother, too! An' didn't you notice, Miss Judith, how arfter her father had come, and she 'd once put her arms 'round his neck an' arsked him to forgive her, an' he 'd kissed an' blessed her, that arfter that never a blemish rolled over her weary soul, but she jes' gave her life out easy, like a baby that didn't know 'nough to be afeerd?

"No, sugar-pie! we hadn't never heerd nothin' 'bout Miss Diana's dying nor Miss Virginny Dabney's marryin' Mars' Archie. Weddin's come 'bout stranger 'n fun'rals, 'pears-like to me sometimes."

CHAPTER XXV.

In the month of February, 1845, Mrs. Archibald Read paid me a visit at my home in Richmond. I had married her brother Wickham five years earlier. I called her "sister," not "aunt," and still loved her very sincerely, albeit the progress of years and the change in our mutual relations had modified the character of my affection.

She was not well this winter, even for her. The chronic invalidism that fell into the lot of seven out of ten Southern gentlewomen at that date had been accepted by her as her earthly portion after the birth of her first child. She had three sturdy boys now, the youngest being four years old. Uncle Archie would not bring any of them with her to town.

"She was worn out," he said, "and needed rest. Nothing else would set her up so soon as a real holiday."

He had a private talk with me the night before he went back, alone, to Summerfield, coming for this purpose up to my room where I was rocking my baby to sleep. It was like the old days of our intimate companionship to see him in an easy-chair I had brought from "home," chatting in the kind, grave voice which was always musical to my ears. First, he listened invitingly to my little tale of my domestic affairs, spoke affectionately of Wickham and our two children (we had named our boy "Archibald Read"), commended my housekeeping and admired our house.

"There is no other life like that of a happy, united

family," he said. "You *do* think that, all things considered, it is well for a woman to marry—don't you?"

"If she loves and is beloved by a good man, she can do nothing wiser," answered I readily.

He did not speak again at once, yet hardly seemed, I thought, to be pondering my reply.

"I have had compunctions on the subject," he began, slowly, not looking at me. "Virginia has become so delicate, and the cares of the house since Mother's and Aunt Betsey's deaths have seemed to weigh so heavily upon her. Maria does her best to help the poor little thing, but there can be only one mistress, you know, and there is no such thing as evading the responsibilities of a mother. It is not surprising, I say to myself, when I see how much devolves upon my wife, that she should flag under the weight and grow thin, pale and nervous. It is hard to forgive myself for taking her from a home and life where she had nothing to do but look pretty and be happy all day long."

"If she had remained there, by this time she would have been an old maid, an orphan and homeless, unless one of her brothers had taken her into his family," remarked I, sententiously.

"Very true! It is a comfort to remind myself of that. She has her children, too. They will be a great solace to her in her declining years."

"If each of them grows up to be as good a man as his father, their mother will be blessed among women!" said I, in loving heat.

He looked pained, not gratified, and stirred uneasily in his chair.

"I don't know about that, Judith!" dryly, and shortly. "I meant, God knows! to make her happy. *I haven't been able to do it!*"

He got up and walked about the room; fingered the

ornaments on mantel and bureau nervously, and when he took his stand on the rug near me, held a cologne-flask in his hand and seemed intent upon fitting in and pulling out the glass stopper while we talked. His lips were compressed, the vein between the brows was dark and full.

"If *you* cannot make a woman content and grateful with her share of wedded bliss no mortal man ought to attempt the task, Uncle Archie!" I found voice to declare.

"That is the pith of my doubt, child!—whether any man ever ought to ask a woman to marry him. She gives up everything—he nothing! Nor can he, with the kindest, most loving intentions, understand her fully. Our sensibilities and perceptions are, like our fingers, all thumbs, when we undertake to handle such exquisite fibres as women's feelings and fancies. For instance, I almost killed Virginia once by asking her jokingly, if her father hadn't over-persuaded her into marrying me. I told her that he was mightily pleased with poor old Captain Macon's flattery of me on the day of the Whig rally in our county; that he had lively hopes of me as a citizen and politician, and worked her up to the point of saying 'Yes' when I asked her for the second time to marry me. I did not dream what a rough jest it was until she burst into tears and left the room. I am afraid sometimes that I was selfish in hurrying on the marriage. I did not mean ever to name the subject to her again, but she was so beautiful, so gentle and winning when I saw her that November week, that I forgot everything except how dearly and how long I had loved her. Her father agreed with me that there was no propriety in waiting for months of engagement to make us better acquainted, and she offered no objection."

"My dear uncle! why should you torment yourself by useless, morbid regrets? Any woman in the land ought to esteem herself fortunate in getting such a husband as yourself. Sister has told me more than once how unutterably good you are to her; that you have fewer faults and more virtues than any other person she ever knew. I wish you could hear her praise you. Don't mind her turns of low spirits and the quiet ways into which she has fallen since your marriage. Many women settle down naturally, as wives and mothers, into that style of speech and manner. Indeed, the exceptions are when they do *not*. The condition of her health accounts for much, too. I hope great things from Dr. Warner's treatment. We will send her home at the end of six weeks so rosy and plump that you will hardly recognize her."

I watched my sister-in-law narrowly while she remained with us. "Settled down" was the fittest word that I could have used in this connection. In her dress she was scrupulously neat and undeniably old-fashioned. Her silks were heavy, her linen and laces fine and abundant, but in style everything was several seasons old.

"What difference does it make?" she asked, when I suggested alterations and modernizing. "So long as they are of good material, whole and clean, they satisfy me. Mr. Read's tastes are simplicity itself. He would not notice if I wore my great-grandmother's clothes upside-down and wrong-side-out, provided my hair was smooth and I had a clean collar on. He never knows what I wear."

"Never criticises it perhaps. Whatever you do is right in his eyes. Every man is better pleased to have his wife 'keep herself up' and study to look young and pretty as long as she can. If you grow old fast, so will he!"

"He was a hundred and fifty when I married him!" Then, catching herself up quickly: "In wisdom and goodness and all that, I mean. Sometimes I am wicked enough to wish that he were not so tiresomely perfect. Do you know, Judith, I think my diseased nerves affect the balance of my mind?"

This I would not let her dwell upon nor myself admit it. She was not strong, she was *ennuyée*, and in consequence unreasonable. At home she had too much leisure and opportunity for introspection. A wholesome waking-up was what she needed. I forced her to walk and drive and to shop with me, whether she felt like it or not, and fairly badgered her into having her wardrobe made over and replenished. Her acquiescence in whatever I insisted upon was very graceful. She smiled sometimes in quiet amusement at my determination to "furbish her up," as she called it, but offered no active opposition. Activity had little place in her existence now. She liked to please other people. She liked her friends, liked her husband and liked her children. An amiable, kind-hearted woman whom everybody liked in return, she was yet irremediably commonplace. Her sprightliness had been an element of youth, and, like youth, was not to be recalled. She must have hemstitched scores of yards of ruffling during her visit. If I had not dragged her up from her rocking-chair by moral and sometimes by physical force, she would have sat there all day, putting her needle in and out so many threads apart and so many times per minute, the material on which she wrought being cobwebby linen cambric.

"For what?" asked I once, impatiently.

She looked up, mildly bewildered.

"Those everlasting lengths of hemstitched muslin! What can you mean to do with them all?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly! It 's always convenient to have them on hand, you know."

In her husband's sight she was still passing fair. My vision beheld reluctantly a small, sallow woman, sallowest on the hollowed cheeks where the roses had bloomed, with paled blue eyes and thinned red-gold hair. A touch of sharpness in nose, chin or voice would have lent a viragoish cast to the faded picture. In default of this, it was insipid.

All this I was reviewing on the morning of her departure. Wickham escorted her home, and the stage had called for them at seven o'clock. I was seated comfortably at my sewing by nine, my boy rolling on the floor in the spring sunshine, while I summed up the result of my character study:

"She never had much force of will. Her heart is affectionate but shallow. When the first horror of the discovery made on the night Harry died was over, she grew to love her husband—because he *was* her husband—as well as she would have loved the man of her choice had she wedded him. There is a sort of lymph in such natures that cures heart-hurt rapidly, as a cut tongue is soon healed by the moisture of the mouth. It is well that women of her type are largely in the majority, otherwise the world would be dark with the shadow of unwritten tragedies."

Pluming myself somewhat upon the apt illustration, in complacent consciousness of my happier and fuller life, I glanced up at the entrance of the chambermaid, whose business it was to set the guest-chamber to rights. She had found a parcel "under Miss Virginny's piller."

"She done forgit it, I reckon. I been see it thar three other mornin's when I make her *bade*" (bed), "an' lef' it back agin."

Something warned me to take it without comment, also, not to unwrap the parcel until the woman had gone out. It was a miniature, rolled up in a white silk handkerchief. The picture was painted on ivory and set in a narrow gold rim. The artist had caught the best expression of the original, the half-humorous, half-loving glance I had seen a thousand times flash from the hazel eyes. The handkerchief was yellow with time, and marked in one corner in well-known characters—"J. H. BRADLEY."

My husband brought me a sealed note from his sister when he returned from the country:

"I left a *small bundle* under my pillow Please let *nobody* see it but yourself, and keep it until you can restore it to me *in person.* It was given to me *many years ago*, and I have had no opportunity to send it back to the donor. I trust you, Judith, and you must *trust me* far enough to believe that *no* wrong is done to ANYONE by my preservation of this memento of a *once dear friend.* I know *appearances* are against me, but indeed, my dear sister, I am *not* a wicked although *an unhappy woman.*"

Surprises and dénouements advance in squads. If they appear singly they are always "strays"—sporadic cases.

About the middle of March I went, accompanied by nurse and baby, down the river to visit a Norfolk friend. Wickham drove with us to the pretty steamer, the "Curtis Peck," then new and popular; secured a state-room for us, established me in a shaded seat on the forward deck, and stayed by me until the signal was given for throwing off the rope. The day was rarely perfect, the scene enchanting. I never look upon the soft undulations of the banks rolling away from the brink of the river to lose themselves in the levels of the back coun-

try, without recalling the lines dropped, one is tempted to suspect, by accident, into the machine-cut, kiln-dried measures of "Divine songs and hymns:"

> "Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
> Stand dressed in living green."

The green was a glorious type of young life on this mid-March morning, gladdening the heart with the promise of bounteous wheat harvests. Peach orchards lay like fallen clouds of rosy deliciousness on the hillsides, apple trees offering the blending shades with which the pink fainted into the snow of cherry-groves embowering farm-house and mansion. The rapids sang and leaped past city and islands; turbid waters, raised high by spring floods, were a symphony in yellows in the sunshine that, as the forenoon wore on, imparted a musing languor to the air and view, and with it the inexplicable charm and beguilement never felt under Northern skies.

I was wrapped in dreams that might have caught their coloring from the blush of the fallen mists on the river-slopes, when a respectful voice addressed me:

"Pardon the intrusion! Am I mistaken in thinking that I address an old acquaintance? Is not this Mrs. Wickham Dabney, formerly Miss Judith Trueheart and my favorite pupil?"

I thought and exclaimed that I should have known him anywhere. Prosperity and a sunny nature had allowed him to mature without losing his youthfulness. His eyes were clear, his smile easy and kind. His voice was even more agreeably modulated than when his Virginian friends overlooked Yankee provincialisms and twang in admiration of his pure articulation and clean periods.

"I read the notice of your marriage in a stray Richmond paper, some years ago," he remarked, seating

himself by me. "But if nothing else had drawn my attention to you, I must have observed your resemblance to Miss Maria Read. She is still living, I hope?"

"Yes, and at Summerfield."

"Has she never married?"

"Never."

Absurdly enough, I shunned meeting his eye in saying it, and felt awkward, in spite of common sense.

"Somebody has been cheated out of an excellent wife! I have never known a nobler, sweeter woman." There was no embarrassment on his side. "I thought at one time that Sidney Macon might win her."

"He married Miss Betty Archer—in 1836, I think. Aunt Maria is even lovelier than when you knew her, the guardian angel of a growing host of nephews and nieces, adopted and real. Hers is a beautiful, beneficent life."

"It was sure to be that in any event. Has she changed much in appearance?"

"Not to our eyes. A little paler perhaps, and a trifle more quiet in general society. Her smile is sweeter, her eyes more benignant with every year that gives her more people to comfort and to bless."

A child, scampering across the deck, tripped and fell in front of us. Mr. Bradley sprang forward to pick him up, soothed his outcry, and delivered him with a bow and reassuring word to the mother when she hastened to the spot.

"I have a youngster of my own about that age," he said in resuming his seat. "I sent a paper with the announcement of my marriage to Archie Read. Did he get it?"

"Yes," again avoiding his eye. "I hope that Mrs. Bradley is well. Is she with you?"

"No. I left her in Philadelphia when I went on to

Richmond last Monday. This is a flying business trip. I saw but few old acquaintances in town. *One* I could wish I had never seen again in this world or the next. I ought not to be seriously affected by what I have heard within twenty-four hours, but it has left a bad taste in my mouth. A man can bear disappointment and loss better than the knowledge that he has been tricked out of something he once possessed or believed was his."

He hesitated, and I looked the inquiry I did not know how to frame into language.

He tried to laugh, but his face flushed uneasily.

"I saw Mr. Allen—Ned Allen—at the Exchange Hotel yesterday afternoon."

"He has gone down hill fast of late," said I, still in the dark. "He has hardly drawn a sober breath in five years."

"He was drunk, very drunk, when I met him on the street night before last, and hardly more sober yesterday when he called at my room, by his own appointment, but in the maudlin-repentant stage. He cried like a baby, while he tried to confess 'the irreparable wrong he had done me, an innocent, inoffensive citizen and a perfect gentleman, sir!' An injury that had lain on his conscience like a fifty-pound weight ever since he periled his soul's salvation for the sake of a flirt. 'Ran the risk of the penitentiary, sir!—and for what? To see myself whistled down the wind, a prey to fortune, and the woman I adored the bride of another! I might have saved my soul this fifty-pound weight of guilt, Mr. Bradley, and let her marry you. This is the dark secret of my life, sir—the fatal step in my career!' After this preamble, he informed me in a tragic whisper that he would confide the whole mystery to my keeping, make a clean breast of it, and put himself,

soul and body, at my mercy if I would lend him five dollars for a couple of days."

"Mr. Bradley! What did he mean?"

I was almost as much shocked by the levity with which my former tutor rattled off his mimicry of the tipsy confession as by the hinted revelation.

"That I cannot undertake to decide! He *said* that he had, through a paid tool in the post-office, intercepted Miss Dabney's letters to me, and mine to her. Perhaps you did not know—you were very young then—probably you have never heard that when I left Richmond in 1832 I was engaged to be married to her?"

"I have surmised as much."

"I was to write to her father asking his sanction of the contract, so soon as she gave me permission to do so. I had not a word in answer to six or eight letters. Did she ever talk to you of the affair?"

"Never!"

I ventured few words at a time and chose these warily. The lava-crust of thirteen years was cracking under my feet. I kept two things steadily before my reeling vision. Virginia Dabney was my uncle's wife. Mr. Bradley was a married man. Nothing but evil could come from the admission into this tragedy of the evidence I held. If he waited for elucidation of the mystery from me he would live and die without it. Between me and the fair panorama of waving grain-fields and blossom-laden orchards arose the figure that had stood on my hearth that Sunday night in February; the visage lined by thought and care, the frosted hair, the sad, patient, loving eyes making unutterably piteous the quietly-spoken regret:

"I meant—God knows—to make her happy. I have not been able to do it!"

Here was the cause of his failure! This trim and

successful Philadelphia lawyer, with his flippant travesty of the gravest aspects of the "affair!" Had the Author of beauty and of love—had the *God of the Covenant* decreed that the life of the nobler man should be a disappointment—an abortion—and that of his rival round and ripe with fullness of satisfaction?

Mr. Bradley cast a keen glance at my countenance, laughed slightly and in a well-bred way, and fell to prodding a crack in the deck-floor with the ferrule of a natty silk umbrella.

"There is a homely saying that there is no use crying over spilt milk. Now that the ache is dead I can confess calmly what a precious cup of cream that was which was knocked over in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirty-two. I shiver in recollecting how my heart sickened and fainted with expecting letters that never came; how I poured love and agony and entreaty into those I wrote. After my meeting with Harry Macon, hope revived. She promised to sift the matter to the bottom and send me tidings. I was sure she would keep her word. Captain Macon's letter came instead. In Sidney's communication, written six months later, informing me of the brave old soldier's death, he said that his father seldom touched pen afterward, but he exerted himself to give me a full account of the poor girl's return and of her decease. 'She breathed her last,' he stated, 'in the arms of that angel of womanly mercy and love, Miss Maria Read.' (Isn't that touch characteristic?) In this letter occurred this paragraph: 'My peerless young friend, Archibald Read, has acted a more than filial part to me throughout this, the most calamitous year in my life history. His hand closed my Harriet's eyes. His wife—the bride of less than a week, sweet Virginia Dabney, whom you must remember well—laid flowers on my child's heart just before the coffin-

lid shut out the beloved face from our eyes for all time.'

"I don't like to reflect, even now, on what that last sentence was to me!"

He shook his head restively—the gesture with which one rids himself of a buzzing gad-fly.

"It is worse than useless to recall it," returned I, in a smothered voice.

"You are right. Wise people let the dead past bury its dead. It is best as it is. It was all ordered wisely, although I wouldn't believe it then. I am married to a woman who suits me a thousand times better than pretty Virginia Dabney would have done, and *she* is just the wife for my old friend Archie. I can say from the unveiled depths of my soul, 'I am glad he has her!' It was that vile Allen's story that set me to thinking of my callow days, and how horribly hurt I believed myself to be for months after the old Captain's letter convinced me that it had been 'out of sight, out of mind' with my Southern sweetheart. Curious, isn't it? that the thought which was the sharpest thorn then is most consoling to me now—namely, that I suffered longer and more bitterly from our separation and the unexplained alienation than she did; that she forgot me, or was comforted for my loss in less than half a year, while it took me a whole twelvemonth to pull myself into shape again."

I did not set him right.

[THE END.]

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